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AN OCTAVE

By M. G. G. G.

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AN OCTAVE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A DEPLORABLE AFFAIR

JACK'S FATHER

MATTHEW AUSTIN

HIS GRACE

THE DESPOTIC LADY

CLARISSA FURIOSA

GILES INGILBY



"THE DOCTOR TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF TO STOP THE FRAY."

PAGE 147.

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MISER MORGAN

“IT’S an inexcusable thing, I know,” said Lord St Ronan, “to dine with a man and then take advantage of his hospitality to pester him for a cheque; but then again, you see, if one don’t ask, one don’t get, and unless a few more subscribers come forward to help us out with the funds of the institution that I was telling you about, I do believe we shall have to wind up the whole concern. So I’m venturing to appeal to one or two rich men, like yourself, Denison——”

“Mercy upon us!” interrupted the entertainer of this eminent and philanthropic nobleman; “is it possible that your heart and your conscience allow you to sit smiling there and call me a rich man? My dear fellow, I have the deepest sympathy with Abandoned Orphans and Destitute Cats and all the other subjects of your generous benevolence; but you might bear in mind that I myself am a landowner and a member of Parliament. Surely that is tantamount to saying that my account is always and inevitably overdrawn! Now, just behind you, if you will screw your

head round for a moment, you will see a man who really *is* rich. Why not give him a chance to save his soul, instead of applying to the victim of pitiless tenants and constituents?"

The dining-room of the club in which the above colloquy took place was invariably graced at that hour of the day by the presence of the elderly gentleman at whom Lord St Ronan hastened to throw an eager, inquiring glance; but his lordship's countenance fell as soon as he recognised the solitary diner.

"Oh, I'm afraid that's no use," said he despondently; "isn't that the fellow whom you call Miser Morgan? I remember being introduced to him on one occasion and asking him for a small donation to the Open Spaces Society. He was very rude indeed; he said he would see me and the Society dismissed into infinite space first."

"And you allowed yourself to be discouraged by such a mild little rebuff as that? Dear me! My experience of you would have led me to give you credit for being a more sturdy beggar. Now, I'll tell you what, St Ronan; if you can manage to extract ten pounds from Morgan to-night, I'll give you a fiver to add to it. There's a fair offer for you."

"It's an uncommonly safe offer, or you wouldn't make it," growled the philanthropist. "Well, one

can but try ; it will be a grand triumph for me if I succeed."

"And you have such a persuasive way with you."

Lord St Ronan caressed his bushy beard. He flattered himself that he *had* rather a persuasive manner, and the bagging of subscriptions meant to him what the bagging of driven grouse or rocketing pheasants meant to his companion.

"I'll tackle your Morgan in the smoking-room presently," he said. "I suppose we shall find him there after dinner?"

"Nothing can be more certain—old Morgan's habits are as regular as the clock. Dinner every evening at eight ; one cigar, which with careful management can be made to last him till half-past ten ; then home to his rooms, where I expect he counts his gold till bedtime. But there'll be no sleep for him to-night, poor chap ! because of course he'll be ten pounds short."

Neither by ten pounds, ten shillings, nor even ten pence, however, was the tale of Mr Morgan's wealth likely to be incomplete ; and Mr Denison, feeling very confident of that, finished his dinner in peace.

Meanwhile, the subject of his rather unflattering remarks had astounded the waiter by doing an absolutely unprecedented thing. He had ordered

a glass of the club port (price sixpence, no less) with the dry biscuit which represented his dessert, and now, leaning back in his chair, he was slowly sipping that generous fluid while he gazed out of the window at the passers-by in darkening Pall Mall. He was a small and very spare man, whose clean-shaven face and strongly marked features had earned for him the sobriquet of Beauty Morgan somewhere about the period of the Crimean war. But that was long ago, and he had since acquired the less complimentary and more appropriate nickname which serves as title to this brief sketch. No more was he remembered in the Guards; the friends whom he had formerly entertained so hospitably at his old place in Surrey were for the most part dead and gone; the place itself had been let for many years, and if its owner was not ruined he chose to pretend that he was so. He set down his glass, with a sigh which might have expressed either satisfaction or regret, and betook himself to the smoking-room, where he caused another club servant to start visibly by selecting a shilling cigar.

But this was nothing to what happened when Lord St Ronan strolled up to claim acquaintance with him and said, with serene audacity, "Now, Mr Morgan, I want ten sovereigns out of you, please. You can't offer me less. Just run your

eye over this list and you'll see that we are all putting our best foot foremost, though we are most of us already subscribers—which you are not."

The little old man took the paper handed to him and adjusted his *pince-nez*, while a faint smile flickered over his thin lips.

"A very excellent object," he muttered; "I am glad to be able to contribute something towards its support. I believe I have a couple of five-pound notes in my pocket; so you can write 'paid' against my name."

It was in this most unexpected way that poor Mr Denison became an involuntary benefactor to persons who had no sort of claim upon him, while a rumour speedily gained ground that old Miser Morgan was either about to die or had gone off his head.

But Mr Morgan's head remained in its customary condition of shrewd capability upon his shoulders, and he hoped that he was not going to die yet awhile. Not, at least, until Dick should have had time to get home from South Africa. It had been absurd and childish, of course, to take that well-meaning idiot St Ronan's breath away by letting him have ten pounds for the asking; but when one has scraped and saved for half a lifetime, when one has submitted without a murmur to universal con-

tempt and obloquy, and when the last of those accursed mortgages has just been paid off, one is surely entitled, for once, to taste again the half-forgotten pleasure of playing the fool with one's ready cash. Yes ; the last of the mortgages had been paid off, and the lease was out, and Mr Morgan might, if it so pleased him, return forthwith to Ridge End, there to end his days, as he had begun them, in the enjoyment of a fine old house and a sufficient income. But habit, which reconciles us to everything, deprives us also of certain capacities for enjoyment, and it was not on his own account that this dogged and slightly narrow-minded old fellow was now rubbing his hands. London lodgings and the club were good enough for him ; for close upon a quarter of a century he had neither mounted a horse nor fired a gun ; it would be out of the question for him to revert to the tastes of a country squire. But he said to himself that he would live again in the person of his son, who was young, strong, a keen sportsman, and who, it might be hoped, had learnt wisdom in the hard school of adversity.

Of hard schooling poor Dick, it had to be confessed, had suffered no lack, and the old man, who was sitting down in his dingy lodgings to write a letter to the exile, felt something like a twinge of

compunction as he thought of bygone years and bygone encounters. But what would you have? We grow old, we repent too late of our past follies, we see those who have inherited our temperament preparing to follow our evil example, and we can but use such methods as experience has suggested to us to save them from themselves. Pleading and preaching are useless; swift, sharp punishment is the only argument to which young blood will yield; he who holds the reins and the whip must use both, or else he may as well throw them away. So, at least, Mr Morgan, who had himself been a spoilt child, had believed, and upon that principle he had acted. By renouncing all save the bare necessities of life, he had contrived to send his son to Eton and Oxford; but he had never been tender with the boy, he had kept him upon a ridiculously insufficient allowance of pocket-money, and had sternly forbidden him under any circumstances to owe a penny to a tradesman. Perhaps it was scarcely to be wondered at that bills had been surreptitiously incurred, that pay-day had come, as it always must come, and that Dick had been packed off to seek his living in a distant colony, with the memory of a paternal rebuke somewhat more severe than his duplicity and extravagance had merited. But then Mr Morgan had intended all along to make atonement—his life,

indeed, ever since Dick's early childhood, had been one long atonement for the self-indulgence which had deprived them both of their home—and if, upon occasion, he had seemed to be unbending and unsympathetic, that had been only because he knew better than anybody what is apt to be the result of misplaced leniency.

All this, and a good deal more, he explained in the letter which it took him a full hour to write, and which begged his dear boy to return to England immediately. His dear boy, who had long been his own master, was now going to be a comparatively rich man; the past was to be forgotten, the future was bright with promise. Only Mr Morgan made no reference to Flo Leighton; because that had been a stupid youthful affair which belonged to the past, and the Leightons, though decent people enough in their way, were not quite in the social class whence the owner of Ridge End might be expected to select a bride. It had been extremely silly of Dick to talk about marrying the girl, when he had not means adequate to his own support; but young fellows will do these silly things, and too much importance should not be ascribed thereto.

For some days after the notable departure from his customs which has been recorded, the *habitués* of the club to which Miser Morgan belonged

watched him as the islanders of Melita watched St Paul; but their curiosity went unrewarded. Port wine was one of the many things for which Mr Morgan had lost all taste, a cigar is not necessarily good because it costs a shilling, and to the comments and opinions of his acquaintances he was wholly indifferent. He made no change in his manner of life, nor did he wish to make any. All he desired was a reply from South Africa, and for that he must needs wait, he knew not how many weeks. It was without the smallest expectation that it would contain anything of personal interest to him that he picked up the newspaper from his breakfast-table one morning, and read the following paragraph, which chanced to catch his eye:—

“*Loss of a Passenger off Cape Verd.*—A telegram from Madeira announces the arrival of the homeward-bound mail steamer *Teuton* from the Cape. The captain reports that, during heavy weather off Cape Verd, one of the passengers was swept overboard by a green sea, and that all efforts to effect a rescue proved unavailing. Mr Richard Morgan, the unfortunate young gentleman whose career has thus been brought to an untimely end, was believed to have been singularly fortunate in recent mining ventures, and was on his way to join his father in London, bringing, it is stated, a large

sum in cash with him. His death is much deplored by his fellow-passengers, amongst whom he had made himself universally popular."

A stag with a bullet through his heart will often go far before he drops. Mr Morgan quietly laid down the paper beside his untouched breakfast, left the club, and walked back to his lodgings with a steady step. Nature, supplemented by circumstances, had made him something of a Stoic; yet it was by no conscious effort that he maintained an unmoved exterior beneath the stroke of the thunderbolt which had thus fallen upon him out of a clear sky. There are calamities so complete and so utterly irremediable that they scarcely touch the emotions at the moment of their occurrence, and are frequently met with sheer disbelief.

Well, there was room for incredulity in the present instance, at all events, seeing that Dick (although, to be sure, he had not written for a long time) had given no intimation of his intention to return to England, and that neither his Christian name nor his surname could be called uncommon. There are, of course, any number of Richard Morgans in the world. The old man kept repeating to himself in a dull, bewildered way, that there were plenty of Richard Morgans, and that it must have been some other Richard Morgan who had taken passage from the Cape,

and had been such a fool as to stand on deck during an Atlantic gale.

He said as much later in the day to two or three friends (he had but two or three left, and they not very intimate ones), who were kind enough to look him up and assure him of their sympathy. "I am not alarmed about my son," he told them; "things of that sort don't happen. I might telegraph to Madeira; but it would cost a lot of money, and the chances are that I should receive no trustworthy information. In a few days the ship will come in; then I shall see the captain and make sure. However, I really feel no anxiety."

But his freedom from anxiety, which scandalised his friends, and caused them to remind one another what a harsh, unnatural father Miser Morgan had always been, did not enable him to sleep or to show himself at the club, or even to eat more than was absolutely needful to keep life in him. How he spent the next four or five days he would have been puzzled afterwards to say. He did not leave his rooms; he did not speak or read or think much; he simply waited for something that was coming nearer and nearer every hour—something that was going to kill him perhaps, if that mattered. His wits must have continued to serve him after a mechanical fashion; for when he went down to

Southampton to meet the *Teuton*, he had the forethought to take his old family lawyer with him. Circumstances might demand proof of his identity and the presence of a legal adviser.

"Not that I anticipate any necessity for troubling you; only it is as well to be prepared for possibilities," he was careful to explain to his travelling companion, who replied:—

"Quite so, my dear Mr Morgan, quite so! I myself seldom leave home without an umbrella, even though there may be no clouds in the sky."

There were clouds enough in the sky, as they were both well aware, and they had not been five minutes on board the mail steamer before doubt had given place to certainty. The captain of the *Teuton*, who was kind and sympathetic, made no difficulty about delivering up the effects of his deceased passenger: that Mr Morgan was the father of the drowned man was as easily proved as that the drowned man had been no other than Mr Morgan's son. Upon the latter point the evidence afforded by baggage and clothes, which were at once recognised, was conclusive. A portmanteau, when opened, was found to contain a faded photograph of the old man, who gazed silently at it, together with—oh, bitter irony!—the last letter, dated some months back, which he had addressed

to his son. Mr Morgan stooped down and possessed himself of this document. He seemed to be under the impression that those who stood beside him were acquainted with its purport; for he thought it necessary to say, in tremulous, apologetic accents:—

“My son and I were upon rather cold terms; I could not write to him quite as I felt. My duty, as I saw it, was to remind him that—that he had given me reason to be displeased with him. For we ought not to forgive ourselves too easily, and he was a careless young fellow—a careless, light-hearted young fellow!”

“He was an uncommonly fine young fellow,” the captain declared, with a touch of indignation. “As merry, kind-hearted and open-handed a fellow as ever I sailed with in my life!”

“Thank you, sir,” returned Mr Morgan; “I am glad you liked him. He was all that you call him, and I dare say you understood him better than I did. However, that is of little consequence now. I suppose he didn’t—er—happen to mention me in any way—just in the course of conversation?”

The captain could not remember that he had done so, beyond stating that he meant to join his father in London by-and-by. “He was to have left us at Madeira. I gathered that he had some

idea of treating himself to a continental trip with the money that he had made at the mines. I have his cash-box, I should tell you."

There was little more to be said and very little more to be done. Certain formalities were undertaken by the lawyer, who saw his client safely back to London, and who knew better than to attempt anything so impossible as consolation on the journey. Yet, after all, he had been for many years the trusted confidant of the so-called miser; he, and he alone, held the key to that long, solitary, self-denying life, and he could not say goodbye without one indispensable word of exhortation.

"My dear Mr Morgan—my dear old friend, you won't stay in these wretched lodgings all by yourself, will you? You will go down, after a time, to your own home at Ridge End, and—and try to form fresh interests for yourself. Meanwhile, if you will only come to us, my wife will give you a warm welcome, and I promise you that you shall not be disturbed in any way."

"Thank you," answered the other, "but I think I will remain where I am, and I hope never to set eyes on Ridge End again. Nevertheless, I am obliged to you for your kind offer. As for fresh interests—well, hardly at this time of day! I understand what you are afraid of; but you are mistaken. I shall neither cut my throat nor blow

out my brains. Besides, if I did, what difference would that make to anybody?"

His despair took that rather unapproachable form. People who were sorry for him (and there are always a few good creatures who are sorry for the most unamiable of us when we are in affliction) did what they could, but fell back discomfited before the cold, dry civility with which their advances were received. Nobody, except the lawyer, knew for certain that he had cared at all for his only son. His wish evidently was to be left alone, and it was, of course, a good deal easier to comply with that wish than to combat it.

A visitor who was, if anything, slightly more unwelcome to him than the rest was Charles Leighton, a man with whom he had at one time been almost intimate, but whom he had carefully avoided ever since poor Dick's absurd announcement that he was engaged to be married to Mr Leighton's daughter. There had been no formal engagement. The girl's parents, who had been reasonable enough, had agreed that, under the circumstances, nothing of that sort could possibly be sanctioned. Still, Mr Morgan had not been altogether satisfied, suspecting them of suspecting him. Nothing was more probable than that they believed, as most people did, that he was really a rich man and could afford to give his son a hand-

some allowance, if he chose. Leighton himself, an elderly, good-humoured stockbroker, was harmless and unobjectionable—as were also, for the matter of that, his wife and his daughter. Only they were utterly unknown in society, and it had seemed prudent to drop them. But now, for reasons best known to himself, here was this prosperous-looking Philistine, with visage elongated to fit the demands of the case, and a suggestion that hands might once more be clasped under the pressure of a common affliction.

“My good man,” said Mr Morgan, “I have no quarrel with you; I am sorry that you should have imagined I had any. Previous to my son’s sailing for South Africa we agreed, if I remember rightly, that we had better see rather less of one another than we had done—that was all.”

“But you can have no objection to seeing us now, Morgan?” observed Mr Leighton, with a sigh. “Whatever your views and wishes may have been, an end has come to them—as well as to our hopes.”

“What hopes?” Mr Morgan asked rather sharply.

It was absurd to be annoyed, seeing that nothing mattered, or ever would matter again, yet he could not help resenting a little the employment of that word.

"Well, if you had a daughter who was growing thin and ill for love of a young man who hadn't money enough to marry upon, and if that young man wrote to say that he was making his fortune hand over hand and meant to be true to the girl of his choice, I suppose you would have hopes, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose I should," answered Mr Morgan; "I'm not blaming you. Dick was in the habit of writing to you, then?"

"He was in the habit of writing to Flo, I believe. You may say that it would have been more straightforward on my part to put a stop to the correspondence when I found out about it, but, hang it all! one isn't made of cast-iron. Besides, I take it that a man of independent means has a right to please himself, and poor Dick, it seems, had become really independent within the last few months."

"From communications which have quite recently been made to me, I gather that that is so," replied Mr Morgan coldly. "I had not hitherto been aware of it. My son did not honour me with the confidence which he reposed in you—or in your daughter. You knew, perhaps, that he was on his way home?"

"Yes; we knew. Dick would have told you, only—well, to speak the truth, I believe he was

a bit afraid of you. He foresaw that you would be opposed to his marriage, and his idea was that he would have a rather better chance of overcoming your opposition by word of mouth than by letter."

"I see. An agreeable surprise that you were all kind enough to prepare for me. Well, we have had a surprise; but it hasn't been exactly an agreeable one, has it?"

Mr Leighton shook his head sorrowfully. He had not expected to be too well received by that hard-hearted old Morgan, and, himself being a worthy creature, he took no umbrage. After a pause he remarked:—

"It's a bad business—a shocking bad business—for poor Flo."

"She will get over it," said Mr Morgan drily. "At her age people get over things."

"Not always, I'm afraid; though, of course, that is what one must hope for. Anyhow, you can understand that it is very sad for her mother and me to see her looking so miserably unhappy, and that we naturally wish to gratify any whim of hers that it is in our power to gratify."

A curt nod of the head signified that Mr Morgan was able to understand that, and his visitor, thus encouraged, went on:—

"It would be a kindness, and I believe it might

even be good for you too, to look her up one of these afternoons. She is very anxious to have a talk with you, and——”

“I am sorry,” interrupted Mr Morgan, “but I must really beg you to excuse me. I am going nowhere at present, nor could I say anything to your daughter which would be likely to do her or me the smallest good. Her trouble, as I tell you, is curable, and will be cured without help from me. Mine happens to be incurable, and it certainly would not console me to talk about it.”

“Well, that isn’t her opinion. She thinks she could tell you things about poor Dick which might give you a little consolation. She has been hearing from him pretty constantly, you see.”

If Mr Morgan had spoken the words which were in his mind, he would have said, “Confound you, you clumsy fool! Why must you needs go on reminding me of that?” But it was not worth while to be angry with the man—it was no longer worth while to be angry with anybody or at anything. So he merely reiterated, in accents of chilling politeness, his regret that he did not at present feel equal to paying visits; after which he glanced meaningfully at the clock.

Yet after Mr Leighton, obviously disconcerted and disappointed, had quitted him, he felt a

twinge of compunction. What, after all, was the use of snubbing people who, no doubt, meant to be kind? It was true that, upon their own showing, they had dealt with him after a fashion which he did not consider particularly friendly; but then he had had no claim upon their friendship, and their designs, like his own, had been brought to nought. If the girl really wished to see him, why should he deny her that poor solace? She was not going to be his daughter-in-law now, he had no reason for holding her at arm's length, and he presumed that she would have sufficient good taste and self-control to refrain from making a scene.

The upshot of this and further musings was that on the following afternoon Mr Morgan rang the door-bell of a house in Bayswater with which he had once been tolerably familiar, and asked for Miss Leighton. Two minutes later he had been admitted into a small morning-room on the ground floor and was shaking hands with a pale-faced, brown-eyed girl, dressed in black, whom he mentally confessed to be both pretty and ladylike.

"It is very good of you to grant my request," she said quietly. "I know it must go against the grain with you to enter this house."

"Not particularly," answered Mr Morgan.

"Situated as I now am, it goes a little against the grain with me to enter anybody's house; but your father seemed to think that it would be a satisfaction to you to see me, and I felt, after he had left, that I had behaved churlishly in refusing."

He honestly believed that he was speaking the truth, and that it had been merely a sense of what one afflicted mortal owes to another, not an overpowering anxiety to hear anything more that Flo Leighton might be able to tell him about his dead son, which had brought him all the way to Bayswater. But Flo Leighton, whose soft brown eyes had rested upon his while he spoke, may have understood him better than he understood himself, for she answered, with apparent irrelevance:—

"It seems as if we had acted in an underhand way, I know, but when you have read Dick's letters, which I want to show you, you will see that his motives were not quite what you think. At all events, you will see that he longed to be friends with you again, and to make some amends for the distress and expense to which you were put through him."

Mr Morgan took, with some hesitation, the bundle of closely written sheets extended to him.

"These letters are not addressed to me," said he; "and—and they are love-letters, I suppose. I am not sure that I ought to look at them."

"But they belong to me, and I wish you to look at them," the girl returned. "Unless you do, you will never know what Dick really was. Besides," she added, with a touch of pride, "I am not ashamed of anything that he has ever written to me."

She had no reason to be so, either on her own account or on that of her correspondent. That much the old man to whom it had pleased her to deliver these ardent epistles from an exiled lover soon perceived. Love-letters, of course, they were, and he did not do more than glance at such portions of them as resembled all love-letters. What interested him—and had doubtless been intended to interest him—were the frequent references to himself and the evidence which these afforded of his dead boy's affection. It was an astonishing, yet indisputable, fact that Dick had done him justice—and more than justice. "The governor passes for being a hard man, but I can tell you that he is harder upon himself than he is upon anybody else. Why, I believe he actually kept himself short of meat and drink to pay for my education! You wouldn't call him unforgiving

if you knew him as well as I do. He'll forgive me when I can show him some substantial proof that I have turned over a new leaf. Until then the best thing I can do is to hold my tongue." And again: "I am not going to write to the dear old chap. I want to give myself the treat of walking into his room some fine afternoon and putting all the money that he has had to pay up for me into his hand. Then I shall tell him how much I have already remitted to England, and then—well, then, I hope, he will come round with me and say something pleasant to his future daughter-in-law. He could hardly be expected to say anything pleasant when he first heard of our engagement, and when I hadn't a sixpence in my pocket."

When Mr Morgan had finished reading his son's letters he folded them up, and, after clearing his voice, handed them back to their owner.

"My dear," said he, "if you intended to convince me that I have lost a daughter-in-law of whom any man might be proud, you have succeeded, for such letters are only written to good women. But I doubt whether that was your object. Your object, I think, was to lessen my misery a little, if you could, not your own."

The girl nodded. "I wanted you to understand," she said.

"Well, you have succeeded there too. But

what can I do?—what can anyone do now that all is over?"

"You can sometimes talk to me and let me talk to you about him," she answered. "You have nobody else to whom you can talk about him, nor have I, for although my parents are as kind as possible, of course they only *liked* him—he was nothing really to them. And I thought perhaps you might feel, as I do, that pain is harder to bear when one can't speak of it."

Mr Morgan was by no means sure that he felt in that way, but he was touched and grateful. It struck him, too, that the poor girl must have been very unhappy before it had occurred to her to seek a confidant in a sour, reticent old man upon whose goodwill she had little reason to count. So he told her what he had told no one else, how his dream had been to restore Dick to his rightful position at Ridge End, how nearly that dream had approached fulfilment, and how he had actually written to recall the wanderer, who, had he but known it, was then lying deep under the Atlantic waves, beyond all reach of recall. Perhaps it was some slight comfort to him to relate these things. Certainly it was a comfort to listen to what Flo had to relate in return, and to be assured that poor Dick had always loved him. This forlorn and oddly matched couple spent upwards of half-an-hour to-

gether, and at the end of their interview each had conceived an affection for the other which seemed likely to endure as long as their joint lives. When Mr Morgan got up to go away he raised the girl's hand to his lips, saying:—

“You have been very good to me. I will come again soon, if I may. For some little time, at all events, I shall not be afraid of wearying you with my senile chatter.”

“There is one subject which can never weary either of us,” she replied, with conviction.

But she was very young and her fellow-sufferer was very old. It would be ridiculous and monstrous and against nature that she should continue grieving all her days. Life lay before her, whereas it lay behind a worn-out septuagenarian. It stood to reason that she would marry some day and forget this early disaster. So Mr Morgan said to himself after he had returned to his lodging, and when, as was not surprising, he began to be sensible of some reaction from his unwonted indulgence in sentiment. To tell the truth, he had been thinking that he would make a will, bequeathing Ridge End to Flo Leighton, instead of letting the place go to the distant kinsman who, in the event of his dying intestate, would inherit all that he possessed; but there arose before him a vision of Flo's future husband—some

Brown, Jones, or Robinson, who would entertain his low-bred friends at Dick's table and shoot the partridges and pheasants that Dick ought to have shot—a vision all the more repulsive because it was almost sure to come true. And then, as one ugly thought is very apt to introduce another, it crossed his mind that the girl's advances might not have been wholly disinterested. He was ashamed of harbouring such suspicions, but he could not help himself. He had seen so much of the baser side of our complicated nature, and he knew so well that absolute singleness of purpose is a very rare masculine and a far more rare feminine attribute.

“Not that I care,” he muttered; “why should I bother myself about what will happen after I am dead and gone? All the same, I don't feel much inclined to leave the old place to strangers, and if she was thinking of that—as I dare say she was, and quite natural too!—she must prepare herself for a disappointment.”

He forgot that Miss Leighton could hardly have been actuated by motives of that nature, since she had not been aware that he had regained possession of his estate until he told her. Many fractious children, and not a few grown-up persons, are wont to put forward imaginary grievances for the sake of being contradicted and comforted; but there was nobody to contradict old Miser Morgan,

to whom at that moment the memory of a nickname, which was no secret to him, chanced to recur and brought a bitter smile to his lips. "Miser Morgan, do they call me?—*miserrimus* would be nearer the mark! I have heaped up riches and I cannot tell who will gather them. Only I know who will not, and I know that I would give them all for just one sight of a face that will never be seen again by mortal man."

The sound of voices on the landing irritated his nerves and seemed to accentuate his solitude. As a general rule, he gave little trouble to servants and submitted uncomplainingly to the very audible chatter and laughter of the housemaid, who seemed to be a young woman of many friends; but now he felt that he must have silence, and he was about to ring the bell and request her to carry on her conversation in a lower key when the door was suddenly opened, and a voice, which was not the housemaid's—a voice which caused him to bound on his chair—said:—

"I'm afraid I have given you a fine fright, sir; but really it wasn't my fault."

"Dick!" shrieked the old man, starting up and stretching out his arms. "But it's impossible!—it can't be! Good God, what a heartless brute you must be, whoever you are, to play me such a trick!"

The stalwart young fellow, who was just in time to save Mr Morgan from falling, did not look much like a heartless brute; although he had perhaps some reason for stigmatising himself as a stupid, clumsy fool. A quarter of an hour later, when his father, who had fainted dead away, had been restored to consciousness, and had stopped his self-reproaches by shaking a tremulous fist at him, and by laughter which was not far removed from tears, he explained how he came to be safe and sound in London, instead of at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

"It is quite simple," he said; "I didn't sail by the *Teuton* at all, though I had taken my passage. The poor chap who was drowned, and who claimed my cabin after relieving me of my money-box and other belongings, found it advisable to personate me, I suppose. When you come to think of it, that was the wisest thing for him to do."

"From his point of view I dare say it was," Mr Morgan agreed; "but I confess that I don't understand how such a scheme could be carried out with any chance of success. Who was he? Why did you let him rob you? And why on earth didn't you telegraph to have him arrested at the first port of call?"

"He wasn't a bad fellow," answered Dick

meditatively. "His name was Johnson—at least, that was the name he bore—and we were pretty good friends up at the mines, he and I. Of course, one comes across some queer fish in those parts, and one doesn't inquire too closely into their history; but I thought he was more or less all right, so I was glad enough of his company when we started to travel down to the coast together—I with my pockets full of money, and he without a brass farthing, poor beggar! He had had the worst kind of luck, while I had had the very best, you see."

"And you thought he was 'more or less all right,' and you considered it prudent to inform him that your kit contained a cash-box full of notes and gold! Then, as might have been anticipated, he knocked you on the head and levanted with your property. Oh, Dick, when will you learn that there aren't any honest men, except you and me, and perhaps a score or so of others, scattered here and there over the surface of a good-sized world?"

Dick had to confess that he had been knocked on the head. He pushed aside his tightly curling hair to show the mark of the blow which had caused him to miss his passage and keep his bed for a matter of ten days.

“As for telegraphing to Madeira,” said he, “I did think of doing that, and of course I should have done so if I could have foreseen that I should be reported in England as drowned. But I didn’t know that anybody had been drowned or that anything had been reported; the first news I had of it reached me from the slavey who opened your door for me just now. And though it was a horrid bore to lose my money and my clothes, I felt that I could afford it. I shouldn’t have liked the idea of sending poor Johnson to prison, for he really wasn’t a bad sort of fellow—confound him!”

Mr Morgan shook his head. “Proceed upon those principles and you will soon be left without a coat to your back,” he remarked drily. “But on the present occasion Providence seems to have intervened, and your cash-box is all safe in the next room. I have heard, too, from your bankers, who tell me that you have become quite a capitalist. You’ll hardly care to hear now that at last I have paid off the mortgages on Ridge End, and that you can take up your residence there as soon as you please.”

“Ridge End!” exclaimed the young man, with wide-open eyes. “My dear father, you don’t mean to say——”

“Oh, yes, I do; why not? Every man is

entitled to his hobby, you know, and that was mine. Besides which, it was distinctly my duty, since the property would have come to you unencumbered if I hadn't been a far greater fool than you are when I was your age. As it is, you have had to suffer for my folly quite as much as I have done. But these are matters which we can discuss at our leisure. May I ask whether you have seen Miss Leighton yet?"

"I haven't seen a soul since I reached London, except some porters and a cabman and your maid-servant. Of course I drove straight here."

Mr Morgan's eyes glistened. "So you came here first as a matter of course, did you?" said he, laying his hand upon his son's broad shoulder. "Well! well! she is a good girl, and I hope she will forgive you; but you mustn't keep her waiting a moment longer than is necessary. Be off with you to Bayswater, and when you are there you might just ask her what she would like a man of moderate means to give her for a wedding present."

"You consent, then?" cried the young man joyfully.

"Come now, Dick! you don't expect me to believe that you would throw that poor girl over if I withheld my consent, do you? To speak honestly, I did think at one time that you might

have looked a little higher with advantage; but I'm not sure that I haven't changed my opinion, and when all's said, it's your affair, not mine. I am only too thankful, God knows, to have you back on any terms! If you proposed to marry a Hottentot, instead of a very charming young lady, I should be ready to give her my blessing."

So there were great rejoicings in Bayswater that evening; and some three months later a quiet marriage was solemnised between Richard Morgan, of Ridge End, Surrey, Esquire, and Florence, daughter of Mr Charles Leighton. The ceremony was perforce a quiet one, owing to the recent death of the bridegroom's father, who succumbed to a sudden fit of syncope a few weeks after his son's return from South Africa. He had accomplished his life's work; his last days were happy, and he was perhaps fortunate in the moment of his exit. Epilogues are so often apt to be tedious and disappointing.

"Well might they call him Miser Morgan!" exclaimed Lord St Ronan when he perused the deceased's will, as reported in the newspapers. "There doesn't seem to have been much personalty; but no doubt he cheated the Chancellor of the Exchequer by making over the greater part of his fortune as well as his real property to his

son. He must have saved any amount of money in all these years—and not one penny bequeathed to charities, I see! Ah, well! I got ten pounds out of him once, and I suppose that is more than any other man living can say.”

THE TENANT OF THE SHAG ROCK

“**B**BROWN?” said Mr Polwhele, holding out at arm’s length the card which the butler had just handed to him, and speaking in a tone of some irritation. “Who on earth is Mr Brown?—and what does he want?”

“Gentleman said he was staying at the Seaview Hotel, sir,” the butler replied. “He wished to speak to you for a few minutes, if you was not too busy.”

Mr Polwhele was as busy as country gentlemen who are supposed to lead a life of dignified ease generally are in these days. He had a number of letters to write and documents to look through. He had intimated to his family at luncheon that he did not wish to be disturbed until six o’clock; he had settled himself down in his pleasant, spacious study, the windows of which over-looked the broad Atlantic, with the firm intention of doing a good afternoon’s work, and now, just as he had begun to jot down the heads of the oration which he would be required to deliver on the morrow at a Primrose League meeting, this confounded fellow

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must needs come bothering! However, he was a good-natured old gentleman, so he pushed his fingers impatiently through his stubbly grey hair and said, in accents of resignation, "Oh, show him in, then."

Presently he made an abrupt half-turn in his chair to scrutinise his visitor, who, contrary to his expectation, did not wear the outward appearance of being either an itinerant politician or a wine merchant's traveller. The new-comer was a tall, lean, melancholy-looking man, whose hair and beard conveyed the impression of being somewhat prematurely grizzled, and the fit of whose loose clothes was evidently not a subject which had engaged much of their wearer's attention. There was, however, no mistaking him for anything but a gentleman, and Mr Polwhele held out his hand at once.

"I must apologise for intruding upon you," the stranger began. "Your servant told me that you were occupied, but I will not detain you long."

"Oh, that's all right—that's all right," returned Mr Polwhele genially. "Please sit down. You are staying at the Seaview, aren't you? Not very comfortable quarters at this season, I'm afraid: in August and September the house is crammed from attic to basement, they tell me. The north

coast of Cornwall has been discovered of late years, you see, and I can't say that the trippers add much to my personal comfort; though of course one is glad that money should come into the place."

"I find the hotel quite comfortable enough for the present," said Mr Brown. "It certainly would not suit me if it were crowded, my object being to live, if possible, in complete seclusion. And that brings me to the reason of my call. You are, I believe, the owner of the small island which lies about three miles westward of the mouth of Penewth Harbour?"

"The Shag Rock, do you mean? Oh, yes, it belongs to me, of course; but I'm afraid you couldn't live there, however great your love of seclusion may be, unless you were prepared to accommodate yourself in a rabbit-hole. There isn't a dwelling-house on the island, and never has been one."

"It would be easy, or at all events not very difficult, to build one," Mr Brown observed tranquilly. "I took the liberty of landing yesterday, and I ascertained that there was a fresh-water spring—which was the only essential condition. What I propose to do, should you be kindly willing to meet me in the matter, is to purchase the island. I could go as far as three thousand pounds."

"God bless my soul, man!" exclaimed the lord of the manor in amazement; "the rock isn't worth three thousand pence! Added to which, I am by no means sure that I have power to sell it. Thirdly and lastly, neither you nor anybody else could attempt to convert it into a place of residence. You think, perhaps, that the sea is always as smooth as it happens to be in this beautiful spring weather, and that you would be able to run to and fro in a steam-launch twice a day? My dear sir, I can assure you that in autumn and winter the Shag Rock is often simply unapproachable for weeks together."

"One would have to provision oneself—I fully realise that," the stranger replied. "A steam-launch would be convenient in some ways, no doubt, but it would be scarcely practicable to keep her lying at anchor. There is, however, a cove with a shingly beach, upon which a fair-sized sailing-boat might be hauled up with the help of a windlass, and I saw that I should have to depend upon a sailing-boat for means of communication with the mainland."

The man was quite in his right mind. Mr Polwhele, who had begun to feel some doubts upon the point, had to dismiss them after his expostulations had been met and the objections that he raised overruled by perfectly practical

and sensible replies. To be sure, it was not exactly what you could call sensible to talk about building a hut on a storm-swept Atlantic island and dwelling therein; still, there was no denying that the thing could be done, and Mr Brown appeared to have thought it all out. For the rest, the very succinct account that he deemed it advisable to give of himself bore the impress of truth. The afflictions which are common to humanity had, he said, fallen upon him somewhat more heavily and at a somewhat earlier age than they do upon the majority of mankind; he had lost all those who had made life worth living for him. His sole remaining pleasure consisted in study, and his sole remaining ambition was to discover some spot in which his studies might be pursued without risk of interruption. Such spots were not to be found every day in a thickly populated country like England; but the Shag Rock would answer his purpose admirably.

“And I cannot think, Mr Polwhele,” he added, with a faint smile, “that that portion of your property can be of any great value to you.”

It was absolutely without value to the prosperous owner of Penewth House, whose prosperity was likely to be increased by the development—which he deprecated—of the fishing village of Penewth into a seaside resort. At the same time he felt

it incumbent upon him to remonstrate with the intending purchaser, from whom, in any case, he could not think of accepting anything like the sum offered.

“Well, I’ll see my agent about it and let you know in a few days,” he said at length, vanquished by the other’s quiet, courteous persistency; “but I warn you that it will cost you a lot of money to erect the hut that you speak of; and when you have to abandon it—as you will within six months at the outside, unless I’m very much mistaken—you won’t see your money back again, you know.”

“You are very much mistaken, sir,” Mr Brown replied, with his faint smile; “it is only natural that you should be. Few people really find books a substitute for the company of their fellow-creatures, though many profess to do so. I am one of the few, and my servant, who has been with me for a number of years, has educated himself to bear with my habits. May I, then, call upon you again—let us say, in three days’ time?”

He rose as he spoke, picking up the shapeless felt hat which he had allowed to fall to the floor; but Mr Polwhele half involuntarily made a detaining gesture. The man was a gentleman; there was something about him, though it would have been difficult to say precisely what, which excited

sympathy and appealed to hospitable instincts. Surely Isabella would not see any objection to his being asked to dinner.

At all events, he was asked to dinner. "My wife and daughters would be delighted to make your acquaintance. In our out-of-the-way part of the world we haven't yet lost the habit of looking upon all strangers as guests," it was explained to him.

But Mr Brown, while expressing his gratitude with perfect politeness and self-possession, begged to be excused.

"I have abjured visiting in any shape or form," he said, "and when one has resolved to spend the remainder of one's days as a recluse, it is best to make no exceptions. Pray apologise for me to Lady Isabella. If after I have taken up my abode upon my island (for I hope it is going to be my island) she finds me a most unsociable neighbour, that, after all, will be better than being bored by an obtrusive one."

Penewth House was a vast grey granite building, containing accommodation for a large number of guests and very seldom left to the sole tenancy of its owner, his wife and his two unmarried daughters; but in the spring of the year there is always a difficulty about filling country houses, and, indeed, the Polwheles themselves were upon the

point of leaving for London. Perhaps it was because they were all alone, and she had nothing else to occupy her mind, that the curiosity of Lady Isabella, a busy, fashionable old person, was powerfully excited by the account given to her of the mysterious stranger.

"Is he genuine?" she asked. "Do you think he can possibly be genuine?"

"He is an authentic human being, and he really wants to buy the Shag Rock, if that is what you mean," answered Mr Polwhele, to whom these queries were addressed across the dinner-table.

"Yes; but why? Can he be going to sink a mine-shaft? Or is it actually true that he has made up his mind to mourn his deceased wife in solitude for ever? That would be so nice of him!—though of course rather silly."

"I can't tell you anything about a deceased wife," Mr Polwhele replied; "he didn't say that he was a widower. He gave me to understand that he had lost everybody and everything—or, at least, not everything, since he was willing to pay three thousand pounds for a bare rock; but I gathered that what he wished for was a sort of living death."

"Well," said Lady Isabella, "I can't help rather hoping that he will get his rock. If he does, we

will try to tame him when we come down again in the summer. But it would be as well to make sure first that there is no deception."

A subsequent consultation with his agent convinced Mr Polwhele that there could not very well be any deception. The Shag Rock, a mere mass of limestone, sparsely coated with coarse grass, and inhabited only by the descendants of a few rabbits which had been turned down there many years before, was so worthless a property from every point of view that Mr Polwhele might have given it away without being a penny the worse off. Such as it was, however, it appeared to be included in the entail; so that a lease at a nominal rent was all that could be offered to Mr Brown when that eccentric gentleman returned to keep his appointment.

He accepted the offer gratefully, and waved aside the dissuasive representations which his landlord felt it right to repeat.

"I shall take care to be provided with a sufficient supply of food," he said; "and as for the difficulty of obtaining a doctor in case of illness, I may tell you that I have been accustomed to living in countries where medical attendance was necessarily dispensed with. Added to which," he concluded, with a short sigh, "I am never ill."

"That is lucky for you," observed Mr Polwhele; "but as you will not be all by yourself——"

"Lucas also is never ill. Lucas is my servant. He is a fairly good cook, as well as an admirable valet, and he understands the duties of a housemaid. Lucas will constitute my entire establishment."

"Then thank God I am not Lucas!" Mr Polwhele could not refrain from ejaculating. "My dear sir, the poor man will infallibly go mad!"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Mr Brown, smiling. "If he finds life on the island unendurable, nothing will be simpler than for him to give me warning; but, as a matter of fact, I daresay he will be often ashore, and Penewth, you tell me, is quite a gay place in the summer months."

Mr Polwhele shook his head.

"It is by no means gay in the winter months, I can tell you! However, if your hut is not an abandoned ruin before next winter, I shall be much surprised. I am only sorry that you should throw away so much money upon building it."

"Thanks to your generosity, I am throwing away nothing upon purchase-money or rent, you must remember," Mr Brown rejoined.

He was so bent upon having his own way that

it would have been a waste of time to oppose him further, and Mr Polwhele could but shrug his shoulders. For some months after this he neither saw nor heard anything more of his queer tenant, and almost forgot the man's existence. In the hurry and bustle of a London season Cornwall seems a very long way off; besides, Mr Polwhele's memory was not a retentive one.

But Lady Isabella, who never forgot anybody, made it her first business, on returning home in August, to inquire what had become of Mr Brown; and the answer to her question was plainly discernible, with the aid of a pair of field-glasses, from the terrace. The hermit's abode had, it appeared, been sent down from London in pieces and fitted together in a marvelously short space of time. Its roof of corrugated iron caught the rays of the sinking sun sometimes, and smoke could be seen rising from the chimney, lending an entirely novel aspect to the hitherto deserted Shag Rock. So completely had Mr Brown made himself at home that he had well-nigh ceased to be a source of wonderment to the villagers, who seldom set eyes upon him, but who had established tolerably friendly relations with his man Lucas. The general belief was that Mr Brown was a fugitive from justice; but he was not on that account thought much the worse

of by a population which not so very many years ago was composed largely of smugglers and wreckers.

"Of course you must call upon him," Lady Isabella said to her husband decisively. "He can't refuse to come and dine if you ask him for the 15th, and tell him that we shall not have a soul staying in the house on that day."

Nevertheless, he could refuse, and did. Mr Polwhele duly had himself conveyed across to the island, was admitted without demur by the bronzed, hard-featured man who opened the door of the hut for him, and was shown into a sufficiently comfortable room, lined with bookcases, where his tenant sat cleaning a gun; but Mr Brown, though as courteous as could be desired, firmly excused himself from being presented to the ladies.

"My wardrobe does not include a dress suit or a white tie," he said, with his melancholy smile. "It is really not in my power to accept your kind hospitality. Will you please tell Lady Isabella, with my sincere apologies, that I must be regarded as being under a vow? I have not spoken to one of her sex for—well, not for a very long time."

"Oh, *that's* it, eh!" thought Mr Polwhele to himself. Aloud he only expressed the polite regret which the occasion seemed to demand. But, as

before, something about the personality of this modern Diogenes appealed to his kind heart and prompted him to resume, after a pause:—

“My dear fellow, don’t you think that you are making rather a mistake? This sort of thing can’t be kept up for ever, you see.”

“I see no reason why it should not be kept up as long as I live,” Mr Brown replied. “You are sorry for me, and I am grateful to you for being sorry; but the truth is that I am not nearly so much to be pitied as you imagine. A solitary existence has no terrors for me; it is what I am accustomed to and prefer. With my books and with an occasional shot at a duck——”

“Oh, come!” interrupted Mr Polwhele, “you aren’t going to tell me that there is much fun to be got out of an occasional shot at a duck, I hope! Why not help me to shoot my partridges next month? We are old-fashioned folks in these parts, and the women don’t accompany the guns.”

“Really, if you will forgive my churlishness, I would rather not. It so happens that I am a pretty good shot, and if I were to take advantage of your kind invitation, I could hardly hope to escape subsequent invitations from your neighbours. I am afraid I must stick to my rule of going nowhere and seeing nobody.”

In the face of such obstinacy there was no more to be said. Mr Polwhele talked a little longer with his tenant, who proved to be singularly well informed upon current events and politics, but whose conversation afforded no clue to the strange resolution which he had adopted.

"It is very evident to me," the old gentleman told his wife that evening, "that the poor beggar has been jilted, and has taken it tremendously to heart. Perhaps the kindest thing to do is to leave him alone and let time cure him."

No other method of treatment, at any rate, seemed practicable, and Lady Isabella, slightly nettled, remarked that, so far as she was concerned, Mr Brown was entirely welcome to go on playing at being Robinson Crusoe. Lady Isabella, indeed, had plenty of other people and things to think about; for her acquaintance was an enormous one, and the interest which she took in her acquaintances knew no bounds. Some weeks after this, when the shooting had begun and the house was full of people, she announced casually that Jack Leybourne was coming down to stay.

"He is to be married very soon, you know, to a Miss Fleetwood—such a good thing! They have been attached to one another for years, it seems; only of course he had no money, and she has only recently come into a fortune through the

death of some distant relative, from whom she had no expectations at all."

"That sounds good luck for Jack Leybourne, whoever he may be," remarked Mr Polwhele; "but his name doesn't at this moment convey any distinct idea to my mind."

"Of course you know perfectly well who the Leybournes are—Staffordshire people," said Lady Isabella impatiently. "Jack is either the second or the third son, I forget which. He has often dined with us in London; so please don't look as if you didn't recognise him when he arrives."

Mr Polwhele was guilty of no such breach of good manners. He was always glad to welcome visitors, even when his memory failed to inform him who they were; and the pleasant-looking, broad-shouldered man, with the short, fair beard, whom he found in the drawing-room before dinner had a vaguely familiar aspect. No doubt, as Lady Isabella had said, he was one of those numerous young gentlemen who turned up in London every year and made themselves useful at dances and theatres in return for hospitality received. On the following day, moreover, Mr Leybourne won his host's heart by proving himself a very nice shot.

"It's a real pleasure," Mr Polwhele said to him confidentially, "to meet with a man who can be

relied upon to kill his birds clean. Some of the fellows whom my wife asks down here—well, I won't mention names, but it does seem to me a most extraordinary thing that so many people who can't shoot should be fond of shooting."

Some association of ideas led him to mention the recalcitrant tenant of the Shag Rock, and, as Mr Leybourne seemed to be much interested in hearing about that singular personage, the old gentleman said: "We'll go and look him up on Sunday afternoon. He hasn't had the civility to return my visit yet; but that don't matter, and it will be something to do, if the afternoon turns out fine and you care for the sail."

The Sunday afternoon did turn out fine, and Mr Leybourne, who, as an engaged man, was not urgently required to accompany the young ladies on a stroll to the home farm, willingly seated himself in the little open boat which his entertainer knew very well how to manage.

"Goodness knows," remarked Mr Polwhele, after the transit had been accomplished and, with the aid of his powerful young friend, he had hauled the boat up on the beach where Mr Brown's boat was lying—"goodness knows how we shall be received! I have always found the man pleasant enough, but he can be deuced disagreeable, they tell me, when he likes. It seems that

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poor old Treherne—our parson, you know—came over, a short time ago, to call and to remonstrate with him upon never entering the church, and he got roundly snubbed for his pains, besides having been horribly sea-sick. I believe Brown told him that he had no sympathy with people who made themselves sick because they couldn't be content to mind their own business."

"Well," observed Jack Leybourne, laughing, "we haven't come to remonstrate, at all events, and I think I can sympathise a good deal with people who turn rusty because their love-affairs haven't gone straight. I myself have been awfully lucky; but there was a time when I didn't think I was going to be lucky, and I dare say I should have been capable of taking up my abode upon a rock in those days."

"Ah!" said Mr Polwhele; "to me, I confess, it seems that a man who behaves as Brown is behaving makes a prodigious fuss about a small matter. But then I'm thirty years older than you are, I suppose."

It did not take long to reach the hut, nor could there be any doubt as to the whereabouts of its owner; for as the intruders drew near, that gentleman's head and shoulders were plainly visible above the writing-table by the window at which he was seated. Mr Polwhele waved his hand in a friendly

fashion ; but his signal met with no response, and the head promptly disappeared. It was some little time, too, before repeated raps upon the closed door brought out the man Lucas, who said, with all the stolid imperturbability of a London butler :—

“Not at 'ome, sir.”

“H'm !” grunted Mr Polwhele, not best pleased ; “he was at home two or three minutes ago, anyhow, for I happened to see him ; but, of course, if he doesn't wish to be disturbed——”

“Mr Brown is not at 'ome, sir,” repeated the servant, without moving a muscle.

“Oh, very well ! I'm afraid I haven't a card with me ; but perhaps you'll mention that I called.”

Mr Polwhele turned on his heel and marched off, with such dignity as circumstances and a rather precipitous descent permitted.

“Ill-mannered churl !” he growled ; “this is the last time that I shall attempt to be neighbourly with him. Since he wants to be sent to Coventry, let him have his way. However, we have had our sail, and you have seen his delightful island. Now, can you imagine any man being such a consummate ass——”

The speaker paused abruptly, struck by a curious scared look upon the face of his companion, who had said nothing during the preceding five minutes.

"Mr Polwhele," asked the latter, in a somewhat unsteady voice, "do you know who that man is? Are you sure that his name is Brown?"

"Of course I ain't," answered the so-called Mr Brown's landlord; "how should I be? I've only his word for it, and I'm quite prepared to be told that he is some notorious malefactor or other. What *is* his name, then?"

"I am very much afraid," said Mr Leybourne, "that his name is Grimston. I may be wrong, and I hope to heaven I am; but if the head that I caught sight of just now wasn't Dick Grimston's head, all I can say is that I never saw such an extraordinary likeness in my life."

"And if it was the head of Dick Grimston— whoever he may be?"

"If it was—well, if it was, I hardly know what I ought to do. I suppose I ought to go back and make sure. I wonder whether you would mind sitting down for a few minutes—it's quite warm under the lee of this rock—while I tell you all about it. Then, perhaps, you could advise me."

Mr Polwhele seated himself at once upon a grassy hillock. "Fire away, my dear fellow," said he; "anything that you may think fit to tell me shall be treated as a confidential communication. Only I had better, perhaps, remind you that I am a magistrate."

"Oh, it isn't a case for the police," answered the other, laughing a little; "it's merely a question—or, at least, it may be—of honour. You know that I'm going to be married soon. Well, the girl whom I am going, I hope, to marry, was once engaged to Dick Grimston."

"And she threw him over, eh? I suspected all along that there was something of that sort. Sorry for Grimston, if Brown is Grimston; but women will change their minds, and I don't see why this supposed discovery should make you turn so white about the gills."

"You will see presently. Dick Grimston, I must tell you, was the best friend I have ever had in the world. He lived, all by himself, upon a nice little property that he had near us in the country, and though, of course, he was a good deal older than I was, he took me up when I was a boy, used to have me to stay with him in the holidays, and taught me all I know in the way of riding and shooting. There never was a better sportsman—or a better fellow."

Jack Leybourne paused and sighed regretfully. "I don't think there's any need to go into the whole history," he resumed; "besides, it wouldn't interest you. I believe I fell in love with Edith Fleetwood before I left school, and I'm sure I was in love with her when I was an undergraduate;

but I never thought of saying so. I had no money, you see, nor the slightest prospect of making any; so that I was in a sort of way contented to worship her from afar. I sometimes comforted myself by fancying that she understood what my feelings were, and I often fancied that dear old Dick Grimston did. Consequently, it was a good deal of a shock to me when Dick informed me one day that Edith and he were going to be married. I can't think how he managed to help noticing my consternation; but he evidently didn't notice it, and he was in the wildest of spirits, poor old chap! Well, there was nothing to be done but to put a good face upon it, and Edith's mother put an uncommonly good face upon it; for Dick was pretty well off in those days. Then, within a month of the day that had been appointed for the wedding, came a most hideous smash. I can't tell you the details, and they don't signify; but I think it was through the failure of some bank that Dick lost every penny he possessed. If Mrs Fleetwood had had her way, the engagement would have been broken off then and there; but Edith wouldn't hear of that, and the end of it was that Dick went away to Australia to begin life afresh, with the understanding that Edith was to follow him as soon as he should have a home to offer her."

Mr Polwhele shook his head. "Very selfish

conduct on your friend's part, in my opinion," was his comment.

"No; I don't think you could call it selfish conduct. How could he desert her when she refused to be deserted? If you knew Edith, and if you had known Dick—— However, one knows precious little about one's best friends; and that was what we all thought when the news came of his having married the daughter of a rich squatter out there. I shouldn't have believed it—and I'm horribly afraid, after what I saw this afternoon, that I don't believe it now—but perhaps I wanted to believe it. He hadn't written for I forget how many months, and Edith was in great distress about some rumour of an Englishman having been robbed and murdered in the district where he lived, when one fine day came a letter from the young woman, saying that her dear Dick had begged her to communicate with his friends and announce his approaching marriage. He was too lazy to write himself, she said, and he had become such a thorough Australian that he seemed almost to have forgotten the old country. But she had been questioning him about Staffordshire, and she was sure we should all be glad to hear of his and her happiness. The story sounded awfully improbable, no doubt——"

"Not a bit of it!" interrupted Mr Polwhele;

“much more improbable things happen every day. Supposing Brown to be Grimston—which isn’t yet proved, mind you—I think I can form a pretty shrewd guess at what has occurred. The squatter’s daughter jilts him; he comes back to England to find that his first love has not only inherited a fortune but engaged herself to a much better fellow; then he plants himself upon a lonely rock in the sulks, curses the whole race of women, and slams his door in one’s face when one takes the trouble to pay him a friendly call. Oh, he be hanged! Don’t you bother your head about him.”

“Oh, I shall bother my head—I shall bother my head,” said Jack Leybourne pensively. And then, as if taking a sudden resolution, he sprang to his feet. “I must see him!” he exclaimed; “it’s indispensable that I should see him. I won’t be away more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, if you’ll be good enough to wait for me here.”

“As you please,” answered Mr Polwhele, with a shrug of his shoulders; “I confess that, if I were you, I shouldn’t see the necessity of an interview.”

“Ah, but then you don’t know all,” returned the young man, who made as much haste to retrace his steps as if he had been—and very

likely he was—afraid of being seduced into shirking a duty.

He was back again before the expiration of the time that he had mentioned. "I can't effect an entrance," he announced; "I shouted and hammered for ever so long, but nobody appeared; so at last I scribbled a few words upon a card and shoved it under the door. Unfortunately, I must leave you by the middle of the day to-morrow; but I suppose that will give him time to communicate with me, won't it?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" answered Mr Polwhele. "With the wind and sea as they are now, there won't be the slightest difficulty about that; though I really don't quite see what he can have to communicate to you. It's no business of mine, but may I venture to ask, as a matter of pure curiosity, whether you contemplate handing Miss Fleetwood over to him, by way of a reward for his constancy?"

"I may have to do so," replied the other gravely. "All along Edith has told me that she considered herself pledged to him; all along she has had great difficulty in believing that he was false to her—— Oh, well; there's no use in trying to explain these things; but if I don't hear from him, do you think—am I bound in honour, I wonder, to tell her what I suspect?"

Mr Polwhele said: "Stuff and nonsense! Either the girl loves you or she doesn't. If she doesn't, you had better make Brown-Grimston welcome to her; if she does, you're entitled to her, in spite of all the desert-islanders that the world contains. You young fellows of the present day have such a mania for splitting hairs that common sense can't keep step with you."

Jack Leybourne's common sense, at all events, was not so obscured by the refinements of modern civilisation but that it led him to much the same conclusions as Mr Polwhele had formed, and, as no message reached him on the morrow from his supposed friend of former years, he drove off to the station with a more or less quiet mind. It was a fact that Edith loved him; he was not quite sure whether it was a fact or not that she had once loved Dick Grimston; all things considered, he was disposed to doubt the expediency of agitating her by the statement that he had caught a glimpse of a man uncommonly like Dick Grimston upon a lonely island off the Cornish Coast.

And what, happily, freed him from all lingering doubts and misgivings was that, just as he was about to step into the train, he found himself on a sudden face to face with the servant who had so inflexibly proclaimed Mr Brown's absence from home on the previous day. A few rapid, point-

blank queries, addressed to the man, elicited replies which could not but be satisfactory to any human being in Jack Leybourne's place.

"Haustralia, sir? Never set foot there in all my born days, nor the master ain't neither, so fur as I know—and I've known him, as I may say, from a child. Nor yet I can't call to mind as I ever come across a party by the name of Grimston. Mr Brown, you see, sir, is an uncommon studious gentleman, and he can't abear for to be interrupted when he's readin' or writin'. Sorry to be obliged to turn you away yesterday, sir; but horders is horders, and 'twould be as much as my place was worth to disobey 'em. The master told me he found your card on the floor; but he couldn't make head nor tail of it. I says to him, 'Seems to me, sir,' I says, 'that this 'ere's a case of what they calls in the police-courts mistaken identity,' I says."

Possibly it was, and Jack Leybourne was compelled by the force of circumstances to hope with all his heart that it might be. There was, perhaps, no particular reason for presenting Lucas with half-a-sovereign; but who can help being open-handed in a moment of supreme relief?

As for Mr Polwhele, he had the good sense to hold his peace, notwithstanding the strong temptation that he experienced to take Lady Isabella and

the girls into his confidence. He was a man who loved to tell a good story, and this really seemed to be a most interesting story; though, to be sure, it laboured under the disadvantage of being an unfinished one. But just because it was unfinished, and because it might, perhaps, be made to end after an undesirable fashion by the interference of irresponsible women, he thought it right to bottle up and cork down both his news and his curiosity.

Such heroic self-control not only deserved but actually received a prompt and fitting reward. Mr Polwhele was seated in his study, that same evening, smoking a last cigar, as his habit was, before retiring to bed. He had already said goodnight to the men who were staying in the house, and whom he had left in the billiard-room; he was listening to the wind, which had begun to blow in short, sharp gusts from the south-west, and he was saying to himself that there would be no shooting on the morrow, when the butler came in to ask whether he could see Mr Brown.

"Of course I can," answered the old gentleman, with alacrity. "Show him in, and bring the spirit decanters and some soda-water. What a queer hour to call!" he added, under his breath, as the man withdrew. "Now, I should imagine, we are going to hear all about it."

That Mr Brown had come for the express purpose of telling him all about it was immediately made manifest.

"No doubt," the nocturnal visitor began, after shaking hands with his host and declining refreshment, "Jack Leybourne has told you who I am."

"Well, he told me who he thought you were," answered Mr Polwhele; "naturally, he could not be quite positive."

"Just so; and I have taken measures which, I trust, may convince him that he has been the victim of some hallucination. But, on thinking it over, I saw that it would be practically impossible to keep you and your family in the dark if you chose to set to work to make inquiries. That is why I am here to relate my story to you and to beg you to keep my secret. When you have heard me out you will admit, I am sure, that betrayal of it would benefit nobody and distress more persons than one. May I take it, then, that you will consider yourself, for the time being, a priest in a confessional, and will listen to what I have to say under precisely similar restrictions?"

Mr Polwhele shifted uneasily in his chair. He wanted very badly to hear the story; but it was not clear to him that he would be justified in committing himself to such a promise, and something

in the sad, honest eyes which met his appealed, as before, to his sympathy and compassion.

"Well, you know, Brown—or perhaps I ought rather to say Grimston," he replied, "I'm not sure that that is altogether fair. You may be going to say things which, for your own sake, or for the sake of others, it would be my duty to reveal. According to Jack Leybourne, you jilted that girl and married somebody else. Now, I shouldn't be surprised if you were about to tell me that you have done nothing of the sort, and that there has been some great mistake. In that case——"

"In that case, Mr Polwhele," interrupted the other calmly, "it certainly could be no part of your duty to make a worse one. I am aware that mistakes have been made, although I was not aware until now that I was supposed to have married anybody; but that does not affect the general situation, as to which no mistake is possible. If you object to binding yourself, all I can do is to rely upon your honour. Having gone so far, I should do more harm than good by holding my tongue now."

"That may be," agreed Mr Polwhele, nodding. "Proceed, my dear fellow; you may be sure that I won't split if I can honourably help it."

The first part of the narrative which Richard Grimston (to call him by his own name) unfolded

without further preface was practically identical with that related by Jack Leybourne on the previous day. It was only when he came to his Australian experiences that Mr Polwhele, who had left the age of sentiment many years behind him, pricked up his ears and became attentive.

"I was extraordinarily fortunate in all my ventures," the narrator said; "everything that I touched seemed to turn to gold; I found myself growing not only comparatively but literally rich day by day. In writing to Edith I did not mention this; because in every enterprise there must be risks, and I was half afraid of disappointing her, half anxious to give her what I imagined would be a joyful surprise. But at length the time came when it seemed prudent to dispose of my land and stock, take ship for England and reveal myself as a well-to-do man. I never wished Edith to join me in Australia; she was in no way fitted for that sort of life.

"So, one fine morning, I set out to ride the whole way down to Melbourne, all by myself, and with a considerable sum of money about me—which was probably a very foolish thing to do. Not that it signifies; still, it was foolish, no doubt, and I paid the penalty of my folly when I was set upon, in a lonely district, by three fellows against whom it was obvious that I couldn't have the ghost

of a chance. Nevertheless, I chose to show fight, and the inevitable result followed. They were caught soon afterwards and had a narrow squeak of being tried for murder, and I got my money back. Not that that signifies very much either. Meanwhile, I had been picked up for dead and carried to the station of a certain Mr Robson, whose family showed me so much kindness during a very long illness that I feel a brute for saying that it would have been a great deal kinder to let me die. There I lay, with a fractured skull and I know not how many other injuries, for months and months; I remember very little about it, except that I was almost always in pain. The doctors who were summoned looked upon it, I believe, as a hopeless case, and declared that, even if they succeeded in saving my life, I should be an idiot for the remainder of it. Yet here I am, sound in body and mind. Or perhaps you do not think that I am so very sound in mind?"

"That remains to be seen," said Mr Polwhele judicially.

"Quite true. Well, I'll get on as quickly as I can. Mr Robson had a daughter, Sophy; that says everything, doesn't it, to a quick intelligence like yours? One has heard and read the same old story so many times in real life and fiction! But my intelligence was in poor working order at the

time, and I suppose that was why no suspicion of the obvious dawned upon me until one afternoon when I was well enough to crawl out to the verandah and when she became—what shall I call it?—unmistakably affectionate. What could I do? I was deeply indebted to her; I hated to make her cry; I would have made any sacrifice, except the one which, of course, I couldn't make, to show my gratitude; but it was essential that she should be told of my engagement, and I told her.

“After that I had some painful experiences, upon which I don't know that there is any necessity for me to dwell. I could not possibly leave the station, being far too weak to mount a horse; so I had to remain where I was for weeks and weeks, which as you may imagine, were not altogether pleasant ones. And during the whole of my protracted illness not a letter had come for me from England.”

“The girl had burnt 'em, you may be sure,” interjected Mr Polwhele.

“Do you think so? It is possible, and, like everything else connected with my misfortunes, it doesn't signify. She undertook to write to Edith for me, since I could not hold a pen myself——”

“I should rather think she did! Why, she wrote to say that you were upon the point of leading her to the altar!”

"Ah, I see!" returned Grimston, with curious indifference. "She may even have thought that she was speaking the truth; for, as I hinted just now, the latter part of my sojourn under her father's roof was marked by incidents which are best forgotten. The end of it was that I had practically to run away, pretending that it was necessary for me to go down to Melbourne on business, and that I should be back in a fortnight, whereas I fully intended to be well out to sea, on my way home, by that time. I trust I have been forgiven; at all events, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been replaced, for I saw the announcement of Miss Sophy's marriage to a neighbouring squatter some time ago."

"And when you reached home, you found that you had been replaced here too?"

"Well, yes; it comes to that. But a man doesn't change his name and hide himself from his friends merely because he has been thrown over by the girl whom he hoped to marry, you will say. I must try to make you understand why I had no alternative. I had completely recovered, and was perfectly well able to write a letter when I landed at Plymouth; but it was a fancy of mine to relate my adventures to Edith by word of mouth; so I travelled down to Staffordshire without saying a word to anybody, and, leaving my portmanteau

at the railway station, set out to walk across the fields and through the woods to the old place. It was a beautiful spring evening, and I particularly wanted to revisit the woods, because I had so often sat there with Edith on bygone spring evenings. She was sitting there still—sitting in the very same old spot under the beech tree; but my friend Jack Leybourne was sitting beside her, and my friend Jack Leybourne's arm was round her waist. I drew nearer and nearer to them, stepping softly across the grass, as I had learnt to do in pursuit of game, and — what do you think she was saying?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It was a nasty jar for you; but you oughtn't to have listened, you know," said Mr Polwhele reprovingly.

"Perhaps I ought not; but I did; and this was what I heard: 'I never can get rid of the impression,' Edith said, 'that Dick will come back some day and claim me. If he does, I must go to him, Jack; I belonged to him before I belonged to you, and somehow I can't believe that he has been false to me.'"

"Very creditable sentiments, in my opinion, considering that evidence of your faithlessness was in her possession. Why didn't you come forward without more ado?"

"Because Jack's rejoinder was, 'But you really

loved me before he went away, didn't you, my darling?' And to that she replied, 'I'm afraid I did, Jack!' So, you see, there was nothing for it but to retire as noiselessly as I had advanced, and disappear in the way that I have done."

"My dear man, I don't see it at all!" Mr Polwhele declared. "On the contrary, your proceeding strikes me as utterly preposterous and uncalled-for. Let it be granted, if you like, that it would have been ungenerous to insist upon your rights, and that, as she preferred Leybourne, you could only surrender her to him; but you were at least entitled to tell your story and explain that you had not taken any Sophy Robson to wife."

"Well, I did not know that I had been accused of having done so; but if I had known, it would have made no difference. To reveal myself to those two would simply have been to ruin their happiness—I was, and am, well enough acquainted with them both to feel sure of that—and as for my own happiness, such as it is, I consult it better by leading the life that I am leading here than by resuming my name and returning to a world with which I am not precisely in love. Now, Mr Polwhele, I have taken you into my confidence, and you know why I have done so. Without your connivance, my secret would be in momentary

danger of discovery. May I rely upon you to keep it?"

Mr Polwhele, being a sensible man, laid back his ears and jibbed. He could hardly do otherwise, and it was clearly incumbent upon him to argue, as he did for the next quarter of an hour, with one whom he inwardly qualified as a fanciful, sentimental jackass, but with whom he strove to be outwardly respectful and sympathetic. He met with no success, and at length his visitor rose, saying :—

"Well, I must not keep you out of bed any longer. Will you, at least, promise to inform nobody of what I have told you until we have discussed the question again?"

Mr Polwhele was prepared to promise that much.

"Will you swear?" Grimston persisted.

"Oh, yes, I'll swear if you like," answered the old gentleman readily, little suspecting the nature of the engagement which he was taking upon himself.

So Richard Grimston walked down to Penewth Harbour, where he had left his boat—and was seen no more by man or woman in this world. The boat came ashore, bottom upwards, on the following day, having been capsized, it was reasonable to assume, in one of the squalls which had

preceded a heavy gale; but the body of the owner was not recovered. And this was really a fortunate thing; because if there had been an inquest, questions might have been asked which Mr Polwhele would have found it embarrassing to answer.

What was very unfortunate—or, at all events, very trying to a naturally loquacious and communicative person—was that Mr Polwhele's lips were sealed by an oath which he had taken in a hurry. To be sure, no good purpose could have been served by divulging the truth to Mr and Mrs Leybourne, who were married shortly afterwards, and who have the reputation of being a singularly happy and devoted couple; still, there have been moments in Mr Polwhele's subsequent life when he has felt it very hard that he should be precluded from speaking freely of the deceased to anybody except the man Lucas; and Lucas, who inherited the whole of his late master's property, has long ago disappeared from his ken.

The circumstance that Lucas was able to prove a will may possibly explain to the perspicuous reader how it has come about that the above narrative can now be delivered to the printers; but Jack Leybourne has not, so far as the present writer knows, searched the records of Somerset House; nor, perhaps, will the names of Leybourne,

Grimston, and Polwhele be recognised by those whom one would scarcely wish to recognise them. It may, however, be added without conspicuous indiscretion that the bearer of the latter fictitious patronymic is a good deal more comfortable now that he has hit upon a method of disburdening his mind, while keeping faith with his conscience.

THE FIRST LORD AND THE LAST LADY

HER intimates, as well as a good many persons who could not claim to have been admitted to her intimacy, were wont to speak of her half-jocularly as the last Lady Adisham. This was in part because the title had become extinct on the demise of her late husband, and in part because she had had two predecessors not less socially prominent than herself. The deceased peer, a dull and insignificant specimen of his order, must have deemed it to his advantage to be provided with clever and brilliant wives, since he had selected and secured no fewer than three of these. He had of course had something, in the shape of great wealth, to offer them in return for their talents, and the third and last Lady Adisham, who had espoused him when he was well-nigh moribund, had doubtless made a good bargain, although some people affected to be shocked at her cynicism. In truth she might, had she been so minded, have pleaded excuses—the usual excuses. Is it to be expected of a

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penniless orphan, confronted by the necessity (and the extreme difficulty) of earning her own living, that she should refuse a coronet and a large fortune rather than to consent to soothe a not unamiable old gentleman's last hours? Sir Arthur Middleton, for one, was of opinion that no blame could fairly be imputed to the beautiful and charming Beatrix; and, as he had known her all his life, not to mention having been in love with her for about two-thirds of it, he was perhaps entitled to hold an opinion on the subject.

To hold and express a high opinion of her was almost the only privilege accorded by her ladyship to this successful politician, who was still young in years, though scarcely so in appearance, and who had once upon a time been far too poor and obscure to think of offering marriage to the girl of his heart. Now that she was a magnificently dowered Countess, while he (through an unexpected series of deaths and the painstaking exercise of his own parliamentary capacities) had not only become a well-to-do baronet but a Cabinet Minister, there was nothing to prevent him from avowing sentiments which he had sedulously kept to himself for many years. At the close, therefore, of a certain season and session he did avow them, in Lady Adisham's partially darkened Park Lane drawing-room, with the result that he was laughed at for his pains.

"My dear Arthur," remonstrated the tall, slim, reddish-haired lady who had worn so much better than he had, and whose smooth white skin bore no imprint of the passage of time, "for what do you take me? And for what in the world do you take yourself? Ages ago we might, as you say, have been a pair of foolish lovers; but we weren't foolish, and we have quite outlived that stage of existence. Of course I am flattered and honoured and all the rest of it, but really I can't, clever as I am, turn a back somersault. Nor can you, clever as you are."

"I don't pretend to be clever," said the First Lord of the Admiralty modestly.

"Don't you? Well, you put forward other pretensions which are at least as extravagant. I don't say that I should have accepted you if you had simply stated in a sensible, businesslike way that you wanted a female partner, well qualified to receive your guests, take the head of your table and push you on in your public career; but I should have been willing to consider the suggestion. What seems to me, saving your presence, to display a deplorable lack of discrimination and sense of humour is that you should assume, at this time of day, the part of an unsophisticated Corydon. As for me, I won't attempt to play Phyllis. I like my liberty, I like my money, I like what I

am pleased to consider my social and political influence. These are substantial advantages which I may or may not, some day, be disposed to barter for equivalents; only I shall never—you ought to know that as well as anybody—give them away in return for pretty speeches which can't take me in for an instant."

"It is you who cannot take me in, Beatrix," replied Sir Arthur, smiling.

He was a grave, swarthy man, slightly bald, with a short black beard, in which threads of white were visible here and there. Most people admitted that he was handsome, but he was too silent, too serious and too sparing of the pretty speeches which he had just been accused of uttering to find much favour with members of Lady Adisham's sex.

"You want me," he went on, "to think you worldly, ambitious and heartless. Well, I don't think you so, and nothing that you can say will make me think you so. That you don't love me is another matter, easy of belief and not at all surprising. But we remain friends, I hope?"

Lady Adisham repressed a gesture of irritation. "Oh, by all means, let us remain friends; and let us talk about something else. Mr Coxwell, for instance, who interests me immensely. I don't see

why that young Under-Secretary shouldn't end by being Premier, do you?"

"Coxwell is an able man," said Sir Arthur dispassionately.

"Good-looking, too, and full of go, which is what so many official celebrities seem to be without. But I can see by the way in which you turn down the corners of your mouth that you consider him a cad. As if people were required to have grandfathers nowadays! Anyhow, I mean to shove him on."

"Is that feasible in a political sense? Socially, it is true, you can do a great deal for him, and I believe you have; but I should doubt the power of any lady, however influential, to obtain high office for her *protégés*. Still, I dare say Coxwell will rise without outside help, provided that he is not in too great a hurry. His rock ahead is his tendency to be carried away by his own facile eloquence."

Once more Lady Adisham had to bite her lips in order to avoid betraying her annoyance. "Mr Coxwell's colleagues, at any rate," she remarked, "are not afflicted with that dangerous facility. Perhaps some of them wish they were."

"I am quite aware that I am no orator," Sir Arthur good-humouredly returned; "but really I

am not envious or jealous of Coxwell, if that is what you mean."

"Aren't you? I should have thought it within the bounds of possibility that you might be."

Her ladyship then yawned, sighed rather wearily and glanced in a marked manner at the clock, whereupon the First Lord of the Admiralty rose.

"Must you be off?" she asked. "Well, it is nearly time for us all to be off. Any chance of meeting you at Goodwood or Cowes?"

He shook his head.

"No; I must stick to work for another week, after which I have to address a meeting at Bristol. Then I shall be free to go home and rusticate."

"It doesn't sound a wildly exciting programme; but you are no great lover of excitement, are you? One of the many differences between us is that I enjoy nothing half so much. That is why I take an interest in Mr Coxwell, whom you neither admire nor envy. He is sure to provide his seniors with some excitement before he has done with them."

Mr Coxwell was indeed pretty sure to do that. Young, talented, pushing and alert, he was determined to make his mark, and he knew that an Under-Secretary who aspires to develop into a Cabinet Minister should above all things cultivate notoriety. He cultivated other things and other

people—including Lady Adisham—for he was not a man to neglect any opportunity of self-advancement ; but his chief solicitude was ever to keep his name before the public and furnish material for leading articles. It was, for instance, just like him to favour his constituents, immediately after the prorogation, with a harangue which many supporters of the Conservative party, to which he belonged, thought amazingly indiscreet. Indiscreet it certainly was, unless Mr Coxwell might be regarded as the mouthpiece of the Government—which does not, as a rule, make important announcements through the medium of its subordinate members. With regard to foreign politics, Mr Coxwell, though he hinted, not obscurely, at sundry momentous probabilities, affected a certain reserve ; but what he did assert in so many words was that a substantial addition to the fleet had become necessary, and that an announcement to that effect might be expected on the reassembling of Parliament. His audience—a very large one—cheered vociferously, for it happened that the British public was just then in one of its recurrent fits of panic, and an impression prevailed in many quarters that our potential fighting strength had been suffered to fall perilously low.

The desired outburst of leading articles promptly followed. Not all of them were complimentary to

the young orator; yet they had to treat him with some degree of seriousness, since he was, at any rate, an official personage, and thus it was his privilege to render the opening days of the dull season quite lively. The question, of course, was whether Mr Coxwell was authorised or not, and the answer could not but be supplied in the forthcoming speech of the First Lord at Bristol.

Now whether Sir Arthur Middleton disappointed his Bristol hearers or not by the painstaking, carefully prepared address which he duly delivered to them on the appointed date, it is certain that he administered a somewhat severe snub to his juvenile colleague, whose recent utterances he totally ignored. Sir Arthur was an advocate of retrenchment, and he produced an imposing array of facts and figures in support of the faith that was in him. The requirements of the Navy, he very reasonably pointed out, must of necessity depend upon what our neighbours might deem to be the requirements of theirs, and no one could pretend to foretell the events even of the immediate future; but he believed he had said enough to show that our actual position was one of adequate security. He was glad to be able to add that there was no present indication whatsoever of a disturbance of European peace.

Sir Arthur was not eloquent, but he was considered a pre-eminently safe man ; moreover, there could be no doubt that he at all events spoke with the approval and sanction of the Cabinet. Consequently, Mr Coxwell was roughly handled by the journalists, some of whom recommended him to bridle his tongue, while others went so far as to suggest that his resignation would be desirable and appropriate. He showed his sense by taking the advice of the former ; as for resigning office, the Prime Minister, who chanced to be abroad at the time, was the only person who could impose upon him a step towards which he felt by no means inclined. The newspapers soon found something else to talk about, and, if the incident was not forgotten, it ceased to be publicly discussed. Mr Coxwell, being blessed with a thick skin, an excellent digestion and a good temper, probably saw little to regret or resent in it.

But although that promising young statesman's withers were unwrung, as much could not be said for Lady Adisham, who was very angry indeed with her old friend and admirer, and who saw in his contemptuous disregard of a pronouncement which had secured so much attention a deliberate, premeditated design to wreck his rival's career. In what sense Mr Coxwell was to be regarded as Sir Arthur's rival her ladyship best knew ; but

it was as such that she inwardly described him, while resolving to defeat his supposed intentions.

"Of course he did it on purpose!" she wrathfully exclaimed. "That sort of thing isn't done by mistake; and it is always his way to affect a sublime superiority and indifference. He thinks he can afford it. Well—we shall see!"

The stalwart, handsome, rather florid-looking man whom she addressed displayed his white teeth.

"So long as *you* do me the honour to take my side, Lady Adisham, I shall feel that neither Middleton nor anybody else can work me much injury," he gallantly declared.

"Ah, but that is not his opinion. He laughs at the idea that a mere woman can count at all in political combinations. And there *is* a combination against you, remember. Sir Arthur is not the only member of the Cabinet who would be glad enough to dismiss you into private life. Nobody, I suppose, is particularly eager to be extinguished by the rising sun."

Mr Coxwell shrugged his shoulders. "I won't call myself the rising sun," he modestly remarked; "but perhaps I may say, without undue vanity, that I am a rising man, and I doubt whether there is a sufficient supply of rising men in our party to warrant the leaders in shunting me."

"Anyhow, they will do their best to keep you back ; and if your interests are not looked after now—— But they shall be looked after. I am going to Homburg next week."

It was upon the deck of a yacht in Cowes Roads that Lady Adisham made the above significant announcement. She did not mention whether her proposed visit to a watering-place where the Prime Minister was seeking health and repose had been previously contemplated or not, and her companion discreetly refrained from questioning her. But his bow, his smile and a prolonged gaze of his audacious black eyes expressed gratitude, admiration—possibly something more into the bargain. With regard to her influence in high quarters he may have been almost as sceptical as Sir Arthur Middleton ; but what was evident, and far from unwelcome to him, was that a lady whom even he, bold as he was, had not yet ventured to approach with serious addresses was about to commit herself somewhat deeply on his behalf. Therefore all he said was :—

"Ah ! I wish *I* were going to Homburg !"

"Oh, you can't do that," returned Lady Adisham decisively ; "you must stay at home—and stick to your guns. Don't make any more speeches ; only let it be understood, when you see an opportunity, that you withdraw nothing."

Mr Coxwell smiled again. He had already decided to adopt those tactics ; but discretion once more deterred him from saying so. It suited him very well, for the time being, to accept the part of this clever, active and self-confident woman's disciple, notwithstanding his belief that he was quite capable of playing his own cards in his own way.

Now, although he was pretty sure of himself, and Lady Adisham was at least equally sure of herself, the truth was that success was anything but a certainty for either of them. All, in short, depended upon whether Mr Coxwell, who had not precisely won the affection of his chiefs, was indispensable or not, and experience proves that very few people indeed are indispensable. Lady Adisham, tripping lightly up to the First Lord of the Treasury, in the vicinity of the Elizabethan spring at Homburg, one fine morning, was received with much cordiality by that nobleman, but was assured, before she had been five minutes in conversation with him, that if there was a subject upon which he really had nothing to say and would fain forget, it was contemporary British politics.

"I never read the English newspapers when I am abroad," he declared ; "still less do I think of perusing other people's speeches. It is so easy not to look at them !"

"But you must know," persisted Lady Adisham, "what Mr Coxwell and Sir Arthur Middleton have been saying. They are absolutely at variance; they couldn't be more at variance! Indeed, it just comes to this, that one or other of them will have to knock under."

"Really?" said the Prime Minister, with raised eyebrows. "Dear me! Then I suppose Coxwell will have to knock under. That will do him no harm."

"If he prefers to resign, harm will be done, not only to him, but to the party," Lady Adisham valiantly asserted. "Besides," she added, "I don't want him to resign."

"Ah, that is serious!"

"I am perfectly serious; though you are so rude as to laugh at me. I regard the whole thing as a personal matter. Sir Arthur Middleton only spoke as he did in order to annoy me, and because he knows that Mr Coxwell is a friend of mine."

"How disgraceful of him!"

"Well, it was foolish of him, and I should like to convince him that it was. You see how frank I am!"

The Prime Minister laughed. "But, my dear lady, why is Mr Coxwell a friend of yours? My acquaintance with him is as yet slight; but isn't he rather——"

"Oh, perhaps. Not so very, though—not to any extent that signifies. And he is prodigiously clever; added to which he has popular opinion at his back."

"If he has popular opinion at his back, he will not require even your powerful advocacy; but our rulers are given to changing their minds from one moment to another. Meanwhile, what step do you wish me to take? Am I to make a public declaration that we, too, have not quite made up our minds yet, and that neither Middleton nor Coxwell can tell what may be our future policy?"

"Of course not! All I want you to promise is that you won't be persuaded to squash Mr Coxwell. Then we shall be all right up to next February, which is a long time hence. All sorts of things may happen before next February."

"Very true. Then I will promise not to squash your friend, upon two conditions: firstly, you are not to mention his name to me again; and secondly, you are to dine with us at the Cursaal this evening."

"Every evening, if you like!" cried her ladyship gratefully.

This was generous of her; because the Prime Minister's wife was a terrible old bore, of whom the smarter and livelier persons whose society she had looked forward to enjoying were wont to fight

shy. But in the cause of friendship some sacrifices must be incurred. Let us hope that the Prime Minister, at all events, was preserved from boredom by the concession which he had earned. The concession which he himself had made was perhaps less important than Lady Adisham took it to be. He did not, it may be assumed, wish to throw over a subordinate who was brilliant in debate and even more so upon the platform; very likely, too, he was waiting (for such was his habit) to ascertain which way the wind blew before shaping the course of the vessel of State through another parliamentary session. If so, the language of the newspapers during the recess, and the reception accorded in late autumn to a cautious oration from his own lips, probably furnished him with the desired information. The country, it seemed, was becoming uneasy; a conviction was gaining ground that recent negotiations with foreign Powers had not resulted in a triumph for British diplomacy, and the man in the street was beginning to assert, with his customary emphasis, that if we had not as many ships as we ought to have, somebody deserved hanging. At the Lord Mayor's banquet, which the Premier was unfortunately prevented by indisposition from attending, Sir Arthur Middleton took occasion to affirm once more that the Fleet was efficient and sufficient—a statement which was

promptly disputed, not only by the Opposition press, but by several organs which usually supported the Government. All this told against a policy of retrenchment and in favour of Mr Coxwell, who had skilfully contrived to insinuate, without once opening his mouth in public, that he would be found a true prophet, as well as an enlightened patriot.

Shortly after Christmas this fortunate and favoured young statesman was one of a large number of guests who had assembled at Adisham Court for sporting and other purposes. He was not, to be sure, very much of a sportsman; but one cannot be everything, and no doubt his comparative ineptitude with a gun or across country left him all the more available for the other purposes alluded to. If amongst these his hostess had meant to include an encounter with the First Lord of the Admiralty, whom she had rather mischievously invited to join her party, she was disappointed; for Sir Arthur wrote to excuse himself, candidly owning that he preferred not to stay in the same house with Mr Coxwell.

This her ladyship chose to construe as an admission of defeat, and it ought therefore to have pleased her, instead of making her quite cross and snappish for a whole morning. She was not, however, cross with Mr Coxwell; on the

contrary, she became, if possible, more gracious than ever towards one who was believed to stand already very well indeed with her. Of course he was going to propose to her. Everybody, including Lady Adisham herself, knew that, and everybody, except Lady Adisham, thought it rather a pity that she should have given him so much encouragement. When an old friend went the length of telling her as much, she innocently inquired :—

“Where does the pity come in? Do you mean that my accepting him or my refusing him would be a matter for regret? Either, perhaps? Well, I am sorry to distress you; but I am afraid it looks as if I should have to do the one or the other.”

She was really in some doubt as to which alternative she meant to choose. She was assuredly not in love with the man, nor was he quite a gentleman, nor did his present social position correspond in any way with that of the last Lady Adisham. On the other hand, he was almost sure of climbing to the top of the tree—would be absolutely sure of doing so, she flattered herself, as her husband; and he was touchingly devoted to her. Moreover, there would be a certain satisfaction in proving to Arthur Middleton that the rival whom he so ostentatiously disdained was capable of cutting

him out all round. It is not at all unlikely that the fortunate Mr Coxwell would have added a titled bride to his other advantages had he not, in an evil hour for him, been commanded to accompany her ladyship to a large neighbouring town, where she had consented to open a bazaar.

He did his best, it is true, to get off joining that particular party; for the town in question happened to be his birthplace, and amongst its inhabitants were several persons whom he was by no means anxious to meet. But Lady Adisham was not fond of being thwarted or disobeyed; so he was fain to bow to her peremptory assertion that a change of scene would be the best thing in the world for the headache which he pleaded. Thus it came to pass that, in the course of the day, he found himself unable to avoid an interview which was not less painful to him than to the extremely pretty young woman who demanded it.

Lady Adisham's observant eyes took note of that young woman, to whom she sold some rubbish or other, and who gazed at her with a sort of distressed fascination; took note also of the circumstance that, immediately after her appearance in front of the central stall, Mr Coxwell's headache became so bad that he was compelled to excuse

himself hurriedly and make for the railway station ; perceived finally (with the aid of a pair of opera-glasses) that her indisposed guest and the unknown, who had exchanged no signs of recognition, left the large hall in which the bazaar was being held together—so close together, indeed, that one of them seemed to be whispering into the other's ear. Clearly, this was a case which demanded investigation. Her ladyship lost no time in leaving the care of the stall over which she was presiding to her coadjutors, threaded her way through the crowd with as little delay as the greetings of numerous acquaintances whom she encountered on her passage would admit, and so emerged at length into a gloomy, well-nigh deserted vestibule. Upon a bench in its darkest corner she detected at a glance the girlish figure of which she was in quest, while the simultaneous flutter of Mr Coxwell's departing coat-tails through the swinging doors which opened upon the street seemed to explain the unconcealed emotion of his late companion, whose face was buried in her pocket-handkerchief.

Lady Adisham was not jealous, nor, to tell the truth, was she much shocked. She held opinions, grounded upon experience, with regard to the habitual ways of men, and really she cared very little whether Mr Coxwell resembled the majority

of his genus in certain respects or not. Nevertheless, there are complications of a class with which it is sometimes just as well to be acquainted; so she did not hesitate to approach the Niobe on the wooden bench.

"I am afraid you are not well," she said gently. "Can I do anything for you?"

The girl dropped her hands, recognised her questioner with a startled cry of consternation, and made as though she would fly precipitately. But a firm little hand clasped her wrist, a smelling-bottle was thrust under her nose, and a voice, which could be as soft and persuasive as any in the three kingdoms, murmured, "Tell me all about it! I am sure you ought to tell somebody, and I am quite safe."

There are philosophic students of human nature who aver that no woman is quite safe; just as a Hebrew psalmist declared, once upon a time, that all men are liars—and has himself, justly or unjustly, rested under the imputation of being a liar ever since. Perhaps Lady Adisham was not worthy of the unreserved confidence which she solicited; but she was, at any rate, an adept in the art of obtaining what she desired. Annie Sherwood (this, it appeared, was the young lady's name, and she was the daughter of a respectable local attorney) required some pressing, yet ended

by yielding to applied pressure and narrating her sad and simple story from start to finish. It was not exactly the sort of story for which her sympathising hearer had been prepared ; but that did not render it any the less affecting. Robert Coxwell, who had wooed and won her years ago, and at whom, in those days of his poverty and obscurity, her prudent provincial parents had refused to look, was not, strictly speaking, liable to an action for breach of promise. Since he had been turned away from her father's door and forbidden to regard himself as engaged to her father's daughter, he was in no way bound to renew an offer which would, of course, have been welcomed in view of the altered circumstances, nor could one who had relied implicitly upon his fidelity complain of him for having written to her as he had recently done. For all that, she had been, not unnaturally, anxious to discover why, if he still loved her (as he had vowed that he did), he should deem it imperative upon him to abandon her. Her curiosity had been fully and candidly gratified.

"I guessed what the truth must be," she said, "and he told me the whole truth in a very few words. Robert was never one to prevaricate or shelter himself behind false pretences. I couldn't spoil his career ; though he did give me the

chance, and would give it me again, I believe, if I were to ask him. I see as plainly as he does what an aristocratic marriage will do for him; so I won't stand in his way, and he is as free to marry you as if I had never been born. Only he *does* love me!"

"Do you really think so?" Lady Adisham asked. "Do you think that he would calmly throw you over if he loved you?"

"He wasn't calm! And I don't think about it—I am sure!" the girl cried. She added, with tardy compunction, "But I ought not to say so to you."

"Oh, don't mind me," her ladyship smilingly returned; "strange as it may appear to you, I have not lost my heart to Mr Coxwell. Perhaps he represented that I had?"

He had been guilty of that—possibly sincere—misrepresentation. Misrepresentations are more often than is usually admitted the result of an honest incapacity to distinguish between fact and fancy, and it may be that Lady Adisham herself was the victim of that very common form of blindness when she pointed out the importance, from Mr Coxwell's standpoint, of maintaining a little longer the fiction that he was about to espouse a lady so distinguished as herself.

"It is absurd of him," she said; "but I forgive

him, and I continue to take an interest in him. Consequently, we will wait, if you please, until he has put his opponents to confusion and won his way to a position from which he may safely stoop to select any bride he likes. You are sure that he does not strike you as being rather—a cur?”

Miss Sherwood flushed indignantly. “A cur! You know he is not!—you know he is a great man!”

“H’m! Suppose we say a big man—which means the same thing in one sense, and not quite the same in another. For the matter of that, I dare say he is no worse than his neighbours. They are all alike—or almost all. Now you must dry your eyes, like a good girl, give me your address, and bide your time. Soon after Parliament meets you shall hear from me, and soon after that, unless I am much mistaken, you will hear from your repentant Robert.”

The above colloquy, initiated in the vestibule of the Town Hall, was concluded beneath the bare boughs of the trees in the adjoining public gardens, whither Lady Adisham had conducted her newly found *protégée*. It was now high time for her to rejoin her friends and hasten homewards. By means of what subsequent strategy she contrived to stave off Mr Coxwell’s imminent proposal

it is needless to relate; she would have been a much less able tactician than she was had she experienced any difficulty in accomplishing that much. She would likewise have been quite abnormally magnanimous if she had not plumed herself a good deal upon her magnanimity and resolved to make her plebeian suitor look, in the sequel, like the fool that he was.

To the public eye Mr Coxwell looked anything but a fool when it became known, immediately prior to the opening of the session, that largely increased naval expenditure had been decided upon, and that the First Lord of the Admiralty, dissenting from the view of his colleagues, had resigned office. The voice of the people had given forth no uncertain sound, Ministers were submissively acquiescent, and, although the news of Sir Arthur Middleton's retirement was received with a sort of *regret d'estime*, it was generally felt that the country could do rather better without him than with him. The appointment of so young and inexperienced a politician as Mr Coxwell to fill his vacant place was pronounced sensational, and some of the graver newspapers doubted its expediency; yet knowing persons, or persons who wished to be thought knowing, expressed no surprise. Coxwell was powerfully backed, they declared, and he did not owe his rapid advancement to his talents alone,

undeniable as they were. Lady Adisham, at any rate, was to be excused for assuming that the triumph in which she shared had been brought about by her own unceasing exertions. As a victory, it was, in truth, dramatically complete, and how was she to know that her exertions had really done rather more harm than good to her candidate? There are men, like Sir Arthur Middleton, who rise to high office by reason of their sterling qualities; and there are others, like Mr Coxwell, who have office—and comparative discretion—thrust upon them because their unfettered eloquence is so apt to embarrass their right honourable friends. The Premier, who was much attached to the late First Lord of the Admiralty, neither liked nor trusted his successor; but the obstinacy of the one and the self-assertion of the other had produced results which there was nothing for it but to accept with a shrug of the shoulders.

In any case, Sir Arthur Middleton had been pretty handsomely beaten, and, that being so, what could be more natural than that Lady Adisham should invite him to dinner? “I haven’t asked Mr Coxwell to meet you this time,” she considerably added in a postscript.

As a matter of fact, she had not asked anybody to meet him; for she looked forward to conferring

with him in private, and of course she was of an age to be her own *chaperon*. On similar grounds she was free to receive Sir Arthur's supplanter when and where she pleased, and that gentleman (with whom she also looked forward to holding a brief conference) obediently presented himself in Park Lane on the afternoon of the day appointed for her *tête-à-tête* dinner.

Mr Coxwell knew, or thought he knew, why he had been summoned. Perhaps that accounted for the visible fact that his habitual self-possession had deserted him, and explained the confused, if profuse, assurances of gratitude which he made haste to offer to his benefactress. Well, a little diffidence was not unbecoming, under all the circumstances, although it would have answered Lady Adisham's purpose somewhat better had he seen fit to assume the air of a conqueror.

"Oh, that is all right!" she ended by interrupting impatiently. "I am glad to have been of use to you, and I am glad that you recognise my poor services. Now, the question is, what practical acknowledgment are you prepared to make of them? You have been wise enough to take my advice hitherto; will you continue to be guided by it, and believe me when I tell you that the one thing still needed to make your social, as well as your political, position solid is—a wife?"

Mr Coxwell grinned nervously and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, although it was a cold day. "Lady Adisham," he stammered, "I feel the full force of what you say. Nobody can be more conscious than I am of the great advantage that it would be to me to—to—in short, to act upon your very flattering and — er — tempting suggestion. But the truth—which I can only throw myself upon your mercy and confess—is that I am not free. As a very young man, I fell in love with and offered marriage to a girl in a somewhat humble station of life, who returned my affection, but whose parents did not at the time consider me a good enough match for her. I was therefore at liberty, when I rose in the world, to treat by-gones as by-gones and pay my addresses in another and more exalted quarter, where I had reason to believe that they would not be unwelcome. I resolved to do this; I even went so far as to tell the girl what seemed to be the fact—namely, that my prospects depended upon my doing it, and to accept my release at her hands. But—what can I say? I find that, after all, I haven't the courage, or the selfishness, or whatever it ought to be called, to play her false. My first love is my only love, and, happen what may, I cannot give her up."

If there was at that moment a thoroughly dis-

comfited woman in London, it was the last Lady Adisham. She had rehearsed with so much anticipated glee the scene in which Mr Coxwell, after willingly swearing to espouse the bride whom she should select for him, was to be informed that her choice had fallen, not upon herself, but upon a far less distinguished person. And now here was this ridiculous snob trembling and apologising because, notwithstanding his snobbishness, he could not quite bring himself to obey her! A more irritating anticlimax could scarcely have been conceived; yet she managed to keep her countenance.

"You allude, of course," said she, "to Miss Annie Sherwood."

Mr Coxwell started and gasped. "Yes; but—how in the world do you come to know anything about her?"

"Oh, I know a great many things. Well, you have anticipated me. I was just about to tell you that a Cabinet Minister should, if possible, be a married man, and that the only suitable wife for you, in my opinion, is the girl who has been rather more faithful to you than you have been to her. I don't blame you for having waited until you had reached the top of the tree before gratifying your romantic inclinations. That shows your worldly wisdom; and I dare say you had incentives not known to me. I only hope that you have not

seriously committed yourself in the exalted quarter of which you spoke just now."

Mr Coxwell, in some bewilderment and confusion, replied that he had not. He was disposed to believe that he might have been mistaken with regard to the sentiments of the lady in question.

"I should think that was not unlikely," observed Lady Adisham musingly. "You see, Mr Coxwell, there are plenty of people—I myself am one of them—who are attracted by promising young members of Parliament and interested in their career. But class distinctions *do* exist, don't they? And taking an interest in a man, or even making a friend of him, is such a *very* different thing from marrying him."

The administering of that small snub was, it may be hoped, some consolation to her. It was likewise a consolation to reflect that, although he would inevitably be made the recipient of Annie Sherwood's full confession, he would never learn how nearly he had approached success in a peculiarly audacious project.

"The fact of your having taken so preposterous a notion into your head only shows that the cleverest men are often astoundingly stupid," Lady Adisham remarked, some hours later, to the solitary guest who permitted himself to inquire whether he

was to congratulate her upon her impending remarriage.

Sir Arthur Middleton modestly disclaimed the imputation of being a clever man. Talent, he observed, is scarcely displayed by getting oneself definitively relegated to private life.

"Well, you are an honest one, anyhow," his hostess generously declared.

"Thank you; yes, I believe I may call myself honest. So, no doubt, is Coxwell, in addition to being clever. That you are extremely clever is notorious, and what, I suppose, furnishes one more proof of my being extremely stupid is that I can't for the life of me understand why you have been moving heaven and earth to convert him into what he is when you had no intention of marrying him."

Lady Adisham's eyes sparkled. "You admit, then, that it is I who have converted him into what he is?" she cried triumphantly.

"At the risk of giving offence to an old friend, I am afraid I can't quite admit that. He swims while I sink, simply because he is buoyant, whereas I am heavy. But I admit that you have thrown him all the cork-jackets and spars you could lay hands upon; and, as I said before, I can't make out why."

"Then all I can say is that you really *are* stupid! Surely you might have guessed that my motive was

to humble your provoking, obstinate pride in the dust."

Sir Arthur raised his eyebrows. "Really? Well, I have been satisfactorily rolled in the dust, whether you were instrumental or not in inflicting that humiliation upon me. But why should you have wished to humiliate me? Is that another stupid question?"

Lady Adisham was decidedly of opinion that it was; but she did not say so. She remained silent for a few moments; after which she asked abruptly: "And what are you going to do now?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Plant my cabbages, I suppose."

"You give up the game like that!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Do you really not care, then, or is it a *pose*?"

"It only remained for you to accuse me of being a *poseur*. Some months ago I was told that I had neither discrimination nor sense of humour, and that I couldn't take you in for an instant."

"To which you rejoined that it was I who could not take you in."

"Well, I withdraw and apologise. You have completely taken me in, if that is the same thing as having puzzled and mystified me. I imagined that you had ambitions which you appear to repudiate. As for me, I plead guilty to having

cherished ambitions of a sober order, and I won't pretend to have given up the game without some regrets. But you say that I am honest as well as stupid, and one must needs pay the penalty of being both."

"Do you know," said Lady Adisham, "I think I rather prefer your stupidity to Mr Coxwell's opportunism."

"In that case," returned the ex-Minister gallantly, "I regret nothing. Except, indeed," he added presently, with a smothered sigh, "what I must regret to my dying day—that you not only can't care for me as I do for you, but that you rather dislike me. I can see no other explanation of your wish to extinguish what you are pleased to call my pride."

"Not even when the explanation stares you in the face? Not even when you force me to pocket my own pride and tell you in so many words that—I don't dislike you? As if one would take such infinite pains to vex a person whom one disliked! Would you like to hear Mr Coxwell's vulgar little story? When he was an impecunious young man, he lost his heart to an equally impecunious young woman, whom, of course, he couldn't marry. So they wept and parted. But now that he is a personage with a big salary and rosy prospects, he isn't too proud to return to his first love, and he

is about to lead her to the altar. Do you trace any similarity between his case and yours?"

Sir Arthur shook his head wonderingly. "None at all," he answered. "My prospects are the reverse of rosy, and I have never, as it happens, been false to my first and last and only love."

"Well," returned Lady Adisham, with something between a laugh and a sob, "since you won't eat humble pie, I suppose I must. Your first and last and only love may have been false to you, or tried to be; but I doubt whether she was ever really false, and—she isn't going to try any more. *Now* do you understand?"

Owing to the combination of qualities which she had ascribed to him, it is not quite certain that he did; but what is a matter of recent and undeniable history is that Sir Arthur Middleton and the last Lady Adisham were united in the bonds of holy matrimony before the end of the season. Her ladyship is persuaded that her husband's official career is by no means at an end, and that she will eventually contrive to secure for him a post not less important than that which his scruples compelled him to relinquish. If this be an illusion, she is at least the happier for entertaining it; so that it need not be grudged to her.

A DAUGHTER OF THE HILLS

THE weather had been sultry and oppressive, even at a height of two thousand feet above the sea-level, throughout that long day of early summer; but now that the thunder-clouds had broken and had rolled away southwards over Spain, gusts of cool wind were sweeping down from the mountains into the narrow valley where Bagnères de Luchon stands; and the visitors to that bright little watering-place, harbingers of the opening season, who had already established themselves there, were stepping forth to breathe the fresh air and listen to the band. Françoise Peyrafitte, released at the hour of sunset from her mother's tiny shop, which did a very modest business by the sale of woollen shawls, mufflers, stockings and other achievements of indefatigable knitting-pins, tripped past these strangers, many of whom turned their heads to take a second look at her; for she was really a very pretty and attractive little figure, with her clear brown complexion, her large dark eyes and her black hair, which was partially concealed, after the Pyrenean fashion, by a parti-coloured handkerchief.

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Françoise did not return the compliment. She had no desire to gaze at these newly arrived tourists, who represented for her the close of the quiet, peaceful winter-time and the renewal of her labours as one of the chambermaids at the Hôtel des Bains, whither she was to repair once more on the morrow. Such labours, with all that they implied and entailed, were little to her taste ; but when one has a widowed mother and a swarm of small brothers and sisters, one must accept with resignation, if not with thankfulness, any means of earning bread that may be obtainable.

"*Levavi oculos ad montes,*" she murmured under her breath as she hastened along the high-road, at the end of which, far away, towered the Port de Vénasque, a cleft in the purple frontier range—"I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

She did not know in the least what signification the Hebrew psalmist had attached to words which had floated down through the centuries to find an echo in the heart of a devout little Béarnaise maiden ; but they had always had a pleasant, comforting sound to her. She had always regarded the beloved mountains as a shelter and defence, vaguely realising that beyond them lay a busy, wicked, relentless world, from whose beckoning signals she shrank back affrighted. Sooner or

later she would, perhaps, have to arise and obey that imperative call (for old Madame Peyrafitte had already begun to point out that four months of wages against eight of hibernation would scarcely do as a permanent arrangement); but for the moment she was thinking less of herself than of somebody else, whom the outer world, it seemed, could no longer spare.

Presently, with a loud clatter of hoofs, he came in sight, cantering at the head of his awkward squad of mounted pleasure-seekers, male and female—as handsome a young specimen of his class as could have been found between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean shores—bright-eyed, hook-nosed, sitting gracefully upon his spirited little horse, and an agreeable object to the artistic eye in his short velvet jacket, his broad scarlet sash and his becoming *béret* of the same vivid hue. Among the numerous equestrian guides of Luchon, Dominique Barraute stood upon a high pinnacle of favour, by reason of his good looks and his engaging manners. He was doing very well indeed for so young a man, and might, but for the tax which France levies in these days upon all her sons, have looked forward shortly to setting up a stable of his own, instead of hiring himself out to Esterrade, the local *maquignon*. But service of at least a year with the colours has become an in-

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exorable necessity, and Dominique, with many another lad who would perhaps never return, was to leave the very next day.

He rose in his stirrups, cracking his whip above his head, as Françoise stepped aside to let the noisy cavalcade pass; over his shoulder he threw a backward glance, showing his white teeth. He had seen her; he had understood; and she knew that she would not have to wait for him very long.

In less than a quarter of an hour, indeed, he had joined her on the thickly wooded hillside behind the Etablissement Thermal, where they were wont to meet at the close of day. For months past they had been in the habit of keeping these tacit, innocent assignations; yet they were not formally betrothed, nor had they ever conversed save upon the most commonplace topics—the weather, the prospect of a lucrative season, the ailments of the Peyrafitte children, and so forth. With the strange, half-savage shyness and reticence of peasants, they had been content to halt there, each secretly assured of the other's love, but drawing back from the plunge of an open declaration, which, in truth, there was not money enough on either side to justify.

On this occasion, however—which differed so sadly, by its final character, from all preceding ones—such an attitude could hardly be main-

tained. They began, to be sure, in their customary detached style. "So, then, you take the train to-morrow morning, Dominique?" "Eh! what would you have? Since one has no choice! And you begin again at the Hôtel des Bains?" "Yes; the time has come." But after this there was a short pause, which was concluded in a manner to render verbal eloquence superfluous.

"You know," sighed Françoise, lifting her head at length from her lover's black velvet shoulder and looking up into his bronzed healthy face, "that my mother will never give her consent!"

"We will make so free as to do without it," returned Dominique, laughing triumphantly. "Are we asking her to support us, then—your mother?"

There certainly would not have been very much use in asking Madame Peyrafitte to do that; but her view happened to be that her children were bound to contribute to her support, and if the eldest of them was to espouse the son of a tipsy old loafer who had saved nothing at all, what likelihood was there of filial obligations being discharged? That she would oppose so rash a betrothal was certain, and Françoise was but partially reassured by the young fellow's confident predictions. According to him, there was nothing to fear, except unavoidable delay. When once he

had served his time—an affair of two years, perhaps, “but we are both young, *allez!*”—he would return to the mountains, never to quit their friendly shadow again; and as for making money, that was as simple a matter as flattering these Parisian ladies and gentlemen, who threw away their *louis* like *sous*. He displayed a couple of gold pieces in the palm of his hand, smiling retrospectively at the facility with which they had been acquired.

“One has but to look at them—at the ladies especially—in a certain way and to pay them—*Dieu me pardonne!*—a few compliments which they do not merit upon their riding, and the trick is done. Oh, we shall not want for bread, you and I, Françoise; you may take my word for that!”

Françoise was not sure that she quite liked her Dominique to look at ladies in the manner alluded to; but as, after all, his heart belonged to her alone, why should she care? Soon she resolutely banished the doubts and misgivings of which she had mentioned only one. Why meet trouble half way and spoil a flying hour of happiness which could not possibly repeat itself for many a long day to come? At the bottom of her heart she was conscious of a determination at least equal to her mother's, and Dominique swore—without even waiting to be asked—that he would remain

faithful to her through all the as yet unknown temptations of military life.

His arm still encircled her waist when they slowly quitted the woods in the twilight, and in this compromising posture they were caught by a stout, elderly, red-faced man, who lurched out on a sudden from behind the Etablissement as they approached that building. He greeted them with a loud peal of laughter, followed by jocularities which, though good-humoured enough, were not of the most refined description.

"Pay no attention to him," said Dominique, a little disconcerted; "he would not wish to offend you if he knew what he was about. But you understand—my last day at home, and the friends who have looked in to drink a glass and wish me good speed—it is not surprising that he should have opened a bottle too many."

Under no circumstances could it be accounted surprising that old Barraute, the most notorious drunkard in Luchon, should have erred after the fashion alluded to, nor was Françoise offended. She was, however, somewhat put out of countenance and apprehensive. One never knows of what indiscretions a man in that condition may not be capable!

Half an hour later (for Dominique and Françoise, like Romeo and Juliet, took a long time to bid one

another good-night), she learned, to her horror, that the indiscretion of old Barraute had been carried to quite unexpected lengths. Madame Peyrafitte, her strongly marked features distorted by wrath and her black eyes blazing beneath her dishevelled iron-grey hair, was standing upon the threshold of the little shop to give the truant a fitting reception.

"*Eh, bien, c'est du propre!*" she cried. "That sot of a Barraute who reels in here to boast of having seen his good-for-nothing son embrace my daughter! Have you no shame, then?"

"There is no need for shame," answered Françoise meekly; "we are affianced, Dominique and I."

But this explanation only added fuel to the flames of Madame Peyrafitte's ire. "Affianced! — you have the face to call yourself affianced, without my permission, to a young coxcomb who has not economised a franc, and who is leaving the place to-morrow morning into the bargain! *Quelle jolie plaisanterie!* Fortunately, we are about to be delivered from him; otherwise I would take care that you should never have permission to stir out of the Hôtel des Bains after working hours."

Françoise had little to say in deprecation of a scolding which was prolonged until bedtime. She had been prepared to be scolded, and experience had taught her that silent persistence is the best

reply to violent words. She did not mean to give up Dominique; nor, if the worst came to the worst, could her mother compel her to do so. She was not even forbidden (though it is true that she did not ask leave) to hurry down to the railway station in the early morning and see the last of her lover. Madame Peyrafitte's bark was ever worse than her bite.

The little platform, thronged with youths who had been reported fit for service, and whose relatives and friends were present in large numbers, afforded no possibility of privacy. Dominique, looking superbly handsome and far more composed than the majority of his comrades—some of whom affected a noisy hilarity, while others did not disguise their dejection—was fain to rest satisfied with squeezing his betrothed's small brown hand. A hasty exchange of whispers and promises to write, a scarlet *béret* waved from the window of a third-class carriage as the train began to move, and all was over.

Madame Peyrafitte, when her daughter returned, was no longer in a rage. She only said, "Listen, my child; what you think that you wish for cannot be. These Barrautes, believe me, are worth nothing. I remember the grandfather, who was stabbed to death in a tavern brawl. You can see for yourself what the father has become; and

the son will follow—it is fatal! You would do better to throw yourself into the river than to marry a drunkard.”

“Dominique does not drink,” pleaded Françoise.

“Eh! not yet, perhaps, but he will. When I tell you that it is in the blood!”

Françoise pondered for a moment and then rejoined quietly: “I think I should marry him even if he did drink. What would you have, mother? I have given him my word, and I cannot forsake him unless he forsakes me.”

Madame Peyrafitte broke out into a harsh laugh. “Let us hope, then, that he will forsake you. That would not astonish me, *ma foi*! By all accounts, he does not detest pretty faces, that fine young man of yours, and he will see plenty of them in his garrison. Let him amuse himself to his heart’s content, provided that he does not come back here to be the ruin of us all!”

“He will come back, and we shall be married,” said Françoise, not at all defiantly, but in the tone of one who states an incontrovertible fact.

It was on a cold December morning that Mr Grantley, who was spending a few days in Paris with his wife on their way to the Riviera, fairly lost his temper.

“Upon my word!” he exclaimed; “this is a

little too bad, and I shall have to make a formal complaint about that confounded housemaid. Here's the sitting-room fire out again, and I couldn't get any water for my bath until I had rung three times. When the woman did condescend to come at last, she looked as sulky as a bear, and wouldn't even answer my humble remonstrances. Really, considering the price that one is charged for attendance——"

"Oh, don't get her into trouble, John," pleaded good-natured Mrs Grantley; "I am sure she is ill, or unhappy, or something, poor creature! I saw her crying just now in the passage."

"I don't want to get anybody into trouble," Mr Grantley declared; "all I do want is to be allowed decent facilities for washing, and to avoid, if possible, being frozen to death. But perhaps that is too much to expect in a hotel where one is only living at a cost of about £7 a day."

"I will speak to the woman," said Mrs Grantley. "Of course it is true that she has been neglecting her work; but most likely there are excuses for her, if one only knew them."

So Françoise was presently summoned into the bedroom of this stout, kind-hearted lady, to whom she offered the apologies which it had seemed useless to address to the irate Englishman.

"Madame has good reason to complain; I have

no head this morning, and I forget everything. It is my little boy who is dying down there in the Pyrenees, and madame, who perhaps has children of her own, can imagine——”

Although Mrs Grantley had no children of her own, her imagination was equal to the demand made upon it. “But you must go to him at once!” she cried. “Why have you not asked leave? Would you like me to speak to the manager for you?”

The faded, submissive little woman, who looked so much older than she really was, shook her head with a faint smile. “Madame is very good; but it would not be worth while. They could not spare me just now, when the house is so full, and I cannot afford to lose my place.”

A little management induced her to relate her pathetic, commonplace story. Married at an early age to Dominique Barraute, whose affairs as a livery-stable keeper at Bagnères de Luchon had not prospered, she had found herself, almost immediately after the birth of her child, compelled to return to domestic service; and although she would have preferred to remain in her own province, the prospect of permanent employment held out by Paris had appealed to her too forcibly to be resisted. Her husband, too, had found a place as coachman to the colonel of his former regiment.

For the moment he was out of work ; but he meant, she believed, to seek a fresh situation. Thus for a matter of seven years they had been living apart, while their boy had been left in charge of the old grandmother at Luchon. Oh, yes ; they would perhaps come together again some day and have a home of their own once more ; there were moments when one hoped and other moments when one despaired. "This world, *voyez-vous, madame*, is a sad place, and one needs all the courage that one possesses to go on existing in it. And now, if I am to lose my little Dominique—!"

"Oh, but you are not going to lose him," the excellent Mrs Grantley boldly affirmed ; "you must not allow yourself to think of anything so dreadful as that. Now I will tell you what to do. You give up your situation here—I will arrange all that for you—you start immediately for Luchon, and as soon as your little boy is well enough to be left, you come to us at Cannes. I happen to be in want of a housemaid, and I can see that you will suit me perfectly. So dry your eyes and pack up your clothes, like a sensible woman !"

If Mrs Grantley did not show herself to be a very sensible woman by thus engaging a servant for whose character she had not taken the trouble to ask, she was, at all events, a rich one, and amongst the many privileges of wealth must be

reckoned that of occasionally doing foolish things with impunity. She had, as it chanced, been guilty of no folly in securing the services and the eternal gratitude of Françoise Barraute, who was as faithful as she was honest and hard-working, and who scarcely ceased to call down blessings from heaven upon her benefactress throughout the long night-journey to Toulouse. It was a long journey, and Mrs Grantley, had she been forced to take it under similar conditions, would have pronounced it an intolerably uncomfortable one into the bargain. But Françoise would not have exchanged the hard seat of her crowded third-class compartment for the most luxurious couch in the world. Adorable third-class compartment, which was conveying her as swiftly as it could towards her beloved mountains and her child! Notwithstanding the alarming reports which she had received from Madame Peyrafitte during the past week, she could not help feeling sanguine and exultant. Her luck hitherto had always been so bad; and now that it had turned in this extraordinary and utterly unforeseen manner, surely she might hope for the best. By "the best" she meant little Dominique's recovery from the chill which was said to have brought him to death's door. There were other things for which she had long ceased to hope—knowing at the bottom of

ner heart that they were unattainable. Yet, when the winter dawn broke, clear and mild, upon the southern landscape, it seemed to her that even these might—who could say?—be in store for her. One miracle (for she could call it nothing less) having already been worked on her behalf, why should not a second or a third follow?

But the line must be drawn somewhere, and to expect that miraculous intervention should hasten the movements of so deliberate a line as the *Chemin de Fer du Midi* would, no doubt, have been unreasonable. So Françoise possessed her soul in patience while the slow train from Montréjeau puffed onwards and upwards, penetrating deeper and deeper into the heart of the eternal snow-capped hills. On reaching her destination about two o'clock in the afternoon, she confided her box to the care of a porter whom she did not know—for seven years of absence make strangers of us all in this world of unceasing decay and renovation—and trudged forth on foot towards the home of her childhood. The mountains, which decay so imperceptibly that their aspect remains the same from the first day to the last of an average mortal's brief pilgrimage, greeted her with a kindly, wintry smile, and seemed to bid her be of good courage. The mercies of God endure for ever, and surely a poor little woman

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who had always tried hard to do her duty to God and man would not be abandoned in this hour of extreme need!

"Comment!—c'est toi!" cried Madame Peyrafitte, grown very old, feeble and white-headed. She stretched out her trembling, gnarled, hard-worked hands to her daughter. "Alas! my child, you come too late! We took him to the cemetery yesterday—our dear, brave little man, who had not the strength to get well, though the doctor said he was almost out of danger. You did not receive my telegram, then?"

Françoise shook her head. She sat down in the dim shop, folding her hands with a gesture of patient resignation which was habitual to her. Somewhere hard by her brothers and sisters were talking and laughing together, already oblivious of transient funereal gloom. She could hear their fresh young voices, which did not jar upon her. Life is like that, she thought; one must be gay and forget so long as it remains possible to be the one or do the other. Happy, perhaps, are those who die ere sin, sorrow and suffering have become more than vague words to them. All she said was, "I have never had any good fortune."

She explained briefly how—through what had appeared to be an exception to the rule—she had been released from Parisian servitude, and Madame

Peyrafitte recounted at somewhat greater length the details of her grandson's sickness and death. The two women spoke quietly, calmly, in low tones, shedding a few tears, but uttering no complaint. What is the use of complaining when the worst that can happen has happened, and heaven itself remains silent and powerless? Neither tears nor prayers avail to restore our dead to us.

"Your husband was at the funeral. I did not speak to him," Madame Peyrafitte said after a time.

She had not spoken to him for years, nursing a dull, implacable resentment against the man who had fulfilled her prediction by following in his father's footsteps, and who, it was easy to foretell, would never earn more than was wanted for the gratification of his personal appetites. She grudged him the money which his wife saved out of her wages and transmitted to him every now and again; the sight of him—always out of place through his own fault, always prosperous in spite of that, and as handsome as ever—turned her blood to gall.

"He is in Luchon, then?" asked Françoise.

"*Mon Dieu*, yes! Did you not know? For several weeks past he has been with his old friend Esterrade, who pays him, one must suppose, though there cannot be much work for him to do

during the winter. They tell me that he makes himself useful by breaking in young horses. He came to the cemetery with an air of being inconsolable. Bah! I would wager that he found means of consoling himself at the *cabaret* before night."

Françoise made no rejoinder. Her husband's confirmed intemperance could not be denied, nor was she ignorant of other grievances which might have been put forward on her behalf against him. But he had never ill-treated her in the sense commonly attached by peasants to that term, and—he was the father of her dead boy. If anything could have made her feel glad, it would probably have been the prospect of seeing him again.

She did not see him—how absurd of her to have fancied that there could be any chance of her doing so!—in the cemetery, whither she repaired towards evening, to kneel beside a freshly made grave. She laid an ugly little wreath of black and white beads upon it (for flowers were not to be had at that season) and remained a long time in an attitude of prayer on the damp, sodden ground, although she was not praying. The episodes of her uneventful, yet most pathetic, life presented themselves to her in slow review while she crouched motionless there, gazing at vacancy with heavy, unmoistened eyes—the few happy months

which had followed her marriage; then the beginning of misfortunes which were to end in bankruptcy; then the break-up, her departure and Dominique's; his *fredaines*—which she would call by no harsher name—her long exile, brightened only by hurried, fleeting glimpses of her little one, for whom she had been glad to labour and toil in that distant, detested city, but who could scarcely be said to have known her. It was not of the longed-for future alone that she had been robbed, but of the past which might have been hers, and had been sacrificed to no purpose since it had led to this! She did not murmur; it had never been a part of her nature to do that; she merely recognised the fact that she had hitherto laboured in vain, and wondered, after a dull, vacant fashion, what was to become of her now. Her husband could have told her. It was her manifest duty and destiny to go on labouring, and to forward him periodical doles out of her economies.

However, he did not make that brutal announcement when she encountered him, on her homeward way, in the deserted Allée d'Etigny, and laid a timid hand upon his arm. On the contrary, he recognised her with a surprise in which some tenderness and emotion were perceptible.

"*Tiens! c'est la mère!* Ah! my poor old Françoise, what a misfortune! He was so pretty

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and he looked so solid—our little one! Well—there was no saving him, it seems.”

“It was the will of God,” said Françoise.

Dominique shrugged his shoulders and laughed. “An amiable sort of God, it must be confessed, to massacre children who have never offended Him! But, as you know, I have never believed very much in the existence of your God. It is not He, I suppose, who has paid your railway fare from Paris?”

“How do I know?” answered Françoise simply. “God may have put it into the heart of a benevolent English lady, who knew no more about me than I told her, to send me home and take me into her service. If I arrive only to find my boy dead and buried, that is not her fault.”

Dominique pointed out, in language somewhat too crude for reproduction, that the responsibility of having practised so ironical a deception must, by his wife’s own showing, rest with Omniscience and Omnipotence. He was not quite sober; although he walked straight and talked distinctly. She perceived the danger of irritating him; yet—when would she find another opportunity so favourable for reminding him of bygone promises and endeavouring to save him from himself? There is a kind of eloquence which depends upon nothing so little as upon studied phrases or intentional

effects, and Françoise employed it, not altogether with success. The bare facts which she enumerated spoke, indeed, for themselves, while her diffidently worded appeal might have found its way to a harder heart than her husband's. But really he could not, for a dozen reasons, make the reply which he was entreated to make.

"Listen, *ma mie*," he began, not unkindly, on the conclusion of a harangue which he had not interrupted; "you ask for the impossible. Where would you have me find the money to buy a house and settle down with you a second time at Luchon? And if that could be done, do you imagine that your life would be a happy one with me? I am what I am, and I am worth what I am worth—which is very little—but at least I am no hypocrite. Let us face the truth. We were young lovers once; now we are something quite different. A pity, if you like, but so it is. You would be contented to live upon a crust, whereas I must have a bottle of good wine to wash it down; you have faith, I have none; you would delight in denying yourself, while there are certain small pleasures for which your priests would be puzzled to offer me a substitute. Is it not evident that we should be like an ill-matched pair of mules, pulling right and left while the cart stuck in the mud? No, no! return to your Englishwoman, who promises

you such handsome wages, and when you have more money than you can spend, remember your scapegrace of a husband, who will never be embarrassed in that way."

Françoise sighed. "That is the end, then," said she; "there is no hope."

"*Eh, ma foi!* One hopes—one must always hope. But not for things which can never be."

He understood what she meant, and he was not displeased, only a little amused. He had had to intimate to other women that love is but a fugitive illusion, and he had always sincerely regretted the necessity for such cruel candour. That poor Françoise, with her prematurely old face and her bent figure, should require to be thus enlightened was, perhaps, somewhat laughable; but he was willing to excuse her for that wilful blindness to plain facts which characterises the whole of her sex. Moreover, he had no wish to quarrel with an amiably disposed creature who would soon have English guineas to give away.

As for Françoise, nobody had ever accused her of being quarrelsome. She presently wished her husband goodnight, and they parted without any embrace, without making any future appointment—also without the reproaches which one of them

might legitimately have addressed to the other. Reproaches, like complaints, are, as a general rule, of little avail, and those who demand the impossible must submit to disappointment.

Madame Peyrafitte, on being briefly informed of her daughter's determination to leave at once for Cannes, did not protest. She said: "It is, after all, the best thing that you can do, since living in idleness is out of the question, and work is not to be had here. Some day, perhaps, when I am dead or crippled, you will come back and take my place. Meanwhile, you do well to place a good many leagues between you and that worthless spendthrift, Dominique Barraute, who has not the shadow of a claim upon your savings."

She went on to mention a trifling claim of her own—the cost of a six-foot concession of ground in the cemetery, and the undertaker's charges—which Françoise promised to defray. She was not more hard-hearted than another; but she was very poor, she could not afford to lose money, and to every other species of loss she was inured by long use and wont.

So, when the benevolent Mrs Grantley's new housemaid quitted Luchon the next day, she had the poor comfort of knowing that her departure left no one inconsolable. Even the mountains, cold, white and clear against a livid grey sky, had

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the air of abandoning her to her fate. They had looked down upon the joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of so many thousands like her! Every dog has his day, and Françoise realised that she had had hers, short though it had been. Work remained to her—at once a necessity and a blessing—and at least she would now be able to do her work without the old ceaseless, hopeless longing to escape from it.

She did her work, in the sequel, so well and gave such satisfaction to her employers that she is at the present time a dignified, middle-aged housekeeper, presiding over the Cannes establishment, which is only occupied for a matter of three or four months every winter. During her long holidays ample leisure is granted to her for revisiting the Pyrenees; but she has not yet availed herself of these opportunities. Her mother is dead; her brothers and sisters are dispersed and provided for; her husband was killed long ago by one of Esterrade's colts, which fell with him and rolled over him. Why should she spend money which is better bestowed upon the young generation on an objectless journey? If the *mal du pays* still attacks her from time to time—and she admits that it does—she has no longer any wish to live at Luchon.

“But I have a fancy for being buried there,”

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she says, "and since madame has been so good as to purchase a piece of ground for me beside my boy, I am content. I like to think that my pinch of dust will be added to the heap on which the mountains stand."

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD

BENEATH the name of Anatole Percier upon his visiting cards appeared, in smaller characters and within brackets, the proud inscription, "Citoyen du Monde." It was a proud inscription, inasmuch as he took great pride in thus openly defining himself; although his friends and acquaintances may have thought, as most of us think, that the time has hardly yet come for patriotic persons to boast of belonging to no country in particular. If, however, the excellent M. Percier's ideas had outrun by a little those of his contemporaries, it was not that he doubted for one moment the superiority of the French to all other nations, and if he had arrived at the conclusion that war was an anachronism, what more fitting spot could have been chosen for the proclaiming of such a discovery than Paris, *la Ville Lumière*. He proclaimed it, therefore (sometimes a trifle inconsequently, it must be owned), both in the monthly reviews, to which he was a valued contributor, and at the frequent *conférences* where he spoke with so much graceful

fluency, and which it had become very much the fashion to attend. Certain eccentricities were willingly permitted to a man of such learning and such sympathetic oratorical gifts.

For the rest, a more amiable old gentleman did not breathe, nor one better satisfied with himself, his only daughter and his widowed lot. Tastes of primitive simplicity, an income augmented far beyond spending-point by literary earnings, a modest flat in the Boulevard de Clichy, which he had no ambition to exchange for one more expensively situated—these things sufficed to maintain a perpetual smile upon the rosy, smooth-shaven face beneath his silvery hair. Marthe, when she married, would have quite an imposing *dot* to supplement her incontestable beauty, and although he was in no hurry to establish her, he recognised that he must sooner or later extend a benevolent reception to one of the aspirants by whom she was beginning to be beset.

Only, of course, his principles compelled him to shake his head at the name of Eugène Caragnon, a Lieutenant of Hussars, whom he liked well enough personally, but whose calling rendered the tentative suggestions of the Caragnon family wholly inadmissible. What!—a man who might at any moment be called upon to take part in the internationally legalised crime of exterminat-

ing his fellow-creatures? "Impossible, my good friends! Say no more about it to me, I entreat you." So they shrugged their shoulders and said no more about it, sad though they felt it to be that something like half a million of francs should be destined to enrich some wretched civilian, whose blood would never be shed upon the sacred soil of the lost provinces. Marthe herself, a little maiden as clever and discreet as she was pretty, had taken good care not to utter a word upon the subject, notwithstanding the surreptitious love-passages which had occurred between her and the handsome young officer. Her father, for all his indulgence and kindness of heart, was—so she mentioned to an interested person—"un peu vif," and he was capable of shutting his door in the face of one who, for the time being, continued to be a frequent and welcome visitor. In Marthe's opinion there was nothing for it but patience and a vigilant watch upon events. Events almost always admit of manipulation by the vigilant and adroit; while it was certain that M. Percier would never go the length of forcing his daughter to espouse a man for whom she felt a positive dislike. Now there was not, nor would there ever be, any man on earth save one who could inspire her with other sentiments than those of profound antipathy.

The principles of good M. Percier inclined him towards bestowing his daughter and her marriage portion upon a foreigner rather than upon a Frenchman. A Russian, perhaps, or an Italian; possibly a German—possibly even, if it came to that, a gross, greedy, dull-witted Englishman; for citizens of the world must be above all prejudices. His acquaintance among aliens was large and increasing. Letters from enlightened men of all nations reached him daily and bore testimony to the appreciation with which his lectures and articles were received beyond the frontiers. Prominent among these was one Professor Rothkopf, who wrote (in deplorable French, to be sure, yet with a fine flow of language) from the well-known University town of Neu Schrecklich to congratulate his accomplished confrère upon the courageous and convincing dissemination of views which he personally shared to the full.

Marthe from the outset conceived a special aversion for this valued Teutonic correspondent of her father's. To begin with, he was a Prussian—a circumstance which might surely have been sufficient to end with him into the bargain! His style, moreover, struck her as being far too unctuous and effusive to be sincere. She suspected him of ulterior designs; and what these were became as clear as daylight to her when

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his son, Hans Rothkopf, appeared in Paris one fine day, bearing a letter of introduction. Neu Schrecklich might be a remote town, situated in a semi-civilised land; but information nowadays is obtainable everywhere, and nothing was more likely than that the Herr Professor had found out how well M. Percier's only daughter was provided for.

As a matter of fact, Professor Rothkopf had made that discovery, and had even based some indistinct visions upon it; but he had not, to do him justice, despatched the long-legged, phlegmatic Hans to Paris with a view towards further spoliation of an already despoiled nation. Hans was destined for a commercial career, and it was indispensable that he should familiarise himself with the French language. That he should likewise be permitted familiarity with such an *âme d'élite* as M. Percier was an incidental privilege for which the professor felt duly grateful to circumstances. For Rothkopf, too, was an advocate of peace, a philosophic observer of the follies and the sad mutual hatreds of mankind, a *Weltbürger*, in so far as the assumption of such a title could be safely combined with loyalty to the Emperor and a due sense of United Germany's right to march in the van of progress. His lengthy, involved, and sometimes slightly unintelligible

epistles were a pure delight, during several months, to his Parisian counterpart, who recognised that the good man's heart and brain were in the right place, despite the difficulty which he evidently encountered in expressing his fine thoughts with precision. That a Prussian, of all people in the world, should have been gained over to a cause which all wise men must needs end by supporting sooner or later was indeed something like a triumph!

Now, when one has taken the success of a great and world-wide cause in hand, it is impossible to bring a microscope to bear upon all the trivial details involved therein. Hans Rothkopf was, perhaps, a rather dull and heavy youth; his hands and feet were large, his speech was slow, his accent was atrocious: that he was adapted to take the affections of a lively French girl by storm nobody could venture to affirm. But happy wedded life has little enough to do with stormy affections, and M. Percier very soon made up his mind to a match towards which he saw no reason why either of the young persons concerned should feel averse. It would be such a touching and encouraging episode, this union of two falsely called natural enemies!—such a distinct advance in the direction of the coming millennium, when swords were to

be beaten into ploughshares, bloated armaments reduced, and the reign of universal brotherhood inaugurated!

Thus it came to pass that Mademoiselle Marthe was plagued with ponderous attentions to which her tart responses usually missed their mark, while Eugène Caragnon's fingers were perpetually and involuntarily stealing towards the hilt of his cavalry sabre. How joyfully would Eugène have picked a quarrel with, and given ultimate satisfaction to, the stupid, intrusive Teuton whom he never failed to find in possession of the field when he visited the Boulevard de Clichy! But he was absolutely forbidden to adopt any such heroic methods of dealing with the situation.

"*Mais, malheureux, vous seriez capable de tout gâter!*" Marthe exclaimed, on one of the rare occasions when her disconsolate adorer had contrived to secure a moment of private conversation with her. "Do you not understand, then, that it is a question of disgusting my father with these people, not of making him feel that he owes them reparation? Nothing will be decided, nothing will be formally suggested, until we meet Professor Rothkopf in Switzerland, where a rendezvous has been appointed for next month. Then perhaps it will be time to declare war—though the declaration must not be made by you."

“By whom, then?”

“That we shall see; but I do not believe that there will be any trouble, unless you make it. This absurd Hans has been instructed to pay court to my *dot*; but he evidently detests me——”

“It would be impossible for anybody to do that, Marthe!”

“Not so impossible as you imagine. But even if he worshipped me, do you think that anything would ever induce me to marry a German? Leave it all to me, and you shall hear good news of us before the summer is over.”

Seelisberg, upon the heights above the Lake of Lucerne, was the scene which M. Percier had selected for his annual holiday; instigated to that choice by his friend at Neu Schrecklich, who favoured the locality, and whose hand he was eager to clasp. Thither, accordingly, as soon as the weather became too hot for life in cities, he betook himself, accompanied by his daughter, and there, on his arrival, he was welcomed by Herr Hans Rothkopf, who was likewise enjoying a brief vacation and had dutifully hastened to spend it with his parents.

“You did well to engage your apartments in advance,” the young man said; “the hotel is large, but you come at the most crowded season. There is no more room left in it for a cat.”

His actual words were, "*Il n'y a blus de blace bour metter un chat*," and Mademoiselle Marthe did not fail to compliment him upon the increasing purity of his accent.

Hans turned duskily red, for he disliked ridicule, though he was not, as a rule, very quick at detecting it. But M. Percier, who was much too polite to laugh at anybody, at once rebuked his daughter's bad manners.

"*Allons, allons, mon enfant!* When you speak German as well as M. Rothkopf speaks French you will have a right to be critical. As for accent, there are as many different accents as there are provinces in France. The object of language is only that one should be able to make oneself understood in it."

For all that, German voices grated upon his ears and set his nerves on edge. These predominated, drowning all others, in the crowded, over-heated *salle-à-manger* to which he was presently conducted, and he was fain, during dinner, to confess to himself (though, of course, not to his daughter, who sat beside him) that it takes a good deal of philosophy and magnanimity to recognise as brethren people who cannot converse without raising such a discordant hubbub about it. The solace of Professor Rothkopf's vicinity was denied to him. That burly personage, placed, with his

rotund spouse, at the other end of the long table, made amicable gesticulations from a distance; but it was not until a very protracted meal had reached its conclusion, and the replete denizens of the hotel had begun to disperse, that the two representatives of advanced thought were able to fling themselves into one another's arms. This they did, when the time came, with immense cordiality, and perhaps Professor Rothkopf, being in high good humour, did not find the process as disagreeable as M. Percier, who had to subdue some natural irritation, did. One may (unless one has the good fortune to be an Englishman) be called upon at any moment to embrace a member of one's own sex, and things must be taken as they come; but really it is a little trying to have to plunge one's nose into a bushy beard, redolent of tobacco and schnapps!

However, the discomfort was but momentary, whereas the joy of exchanging ideas with an admiring sympathiser was, it might be hoped, likely to prove a permanent possession. The Frau Professorin lost no time in leading away Marthe, while her husband, after lighting a prodigious pipe, invited M. Percier to accompany him to a sequestered bench in the grounds that he knew of, where, he remarked, "*nous pourrions jaser à notre aise.*"

"*Ghazer*," he said, in a voice which might have been his son's, and he proceeded to demonstrate that, however eccentric might be his phonetic rendering of the verb, he was only too well able to give it practical effect. Not a syllable could poor M. Percier insert edgeways during the next ten minutes; and this was the more exasperating because two thirds of Professor Rothkopf's somewhat arrogant harangue cried aloud for deprecatory interruption.

"*Mais mon ! Mais pardon !*" exclaimed the outraged apostle of human solidarity at length; "you exaggerate! You completely misinterpret my views! I maintain, it is true, that national barriers should be abolished, and that the stupid, brutal argument of supremacy by means of mere physical or mechanical force has had its day. But never have I said or thought that any one race—least of all the Germanic!—was destined to swallow up and assimilate all the rest. You must—excuse me—have studied my humble utterances in a singularly superficial spirit to arrive at conclusions so grotesque."

The professor's fat sides were shaken by a slow, rumbling laugh. "My good sir," he returned, with an air of patronage which was the more provoking because (in addition to its being so misplaced) it was evidently not intended to give

offence, "the question is merely one of figures. We Germans are increasing, while you Frenchmen are stationary, if not diminishing. Already we out-number you by some fourteen millions; a quarter of a century hence the difference will be even more striking, and I think we may assume that the era of universal peace will scarcely have been inaugurated within that space of time. I look upon it, therefore, as inevitable that, whether Germany, England or Russia is destined to preponderate in the future parliament of the world, France can only be represented by a minority. A respectable and intellectual minority, if you like; still a minority."

This absurd theory of the virtue of mere numbers deserved to be combated, and was combated with no little vivacity. Both disputants waxed rather warmer than beseemed the serenity of the philosophic mind; yet the discussion might have ended without an actual rupture of amicable relations if they had not at length found themselves endeavouring to analyse the causes which had led to the catastrophe of 1870. That perilous point having been reached, serenity and philosophy took swift wing, leaving the field to sheer thunder and lightning. A moment soon arrived when Professor Rothkopf and M. Percier, glaring ferociously and smarting under the lash of un-

pardonable speeches, were ready to revert to the first principles of barbarism.

“*Butor!*” muttered the Frenchman.

“Pig-dog!” growled the German in his bristling beard.

Then they shouted simultaneously, “Say that again, sir!” And then, alas! M. Percier’s open palm fell—whack!—upon his neighbour’s cheek, while his own nose was forcibly and painfully tweaked between a Teutonic finger and thumb.

The next instant they were, of course, rather ashamed of themselves; but what use, after all, is there in a repentance which cannot honourably be avowed? Blows had been exchanged; apologies were no longer to be thought of; and, although neither of these men of peace had ever fought a duel in his life, each clearly perceived that he would have to do so now.

“Sir!” called out the professor, drawing himself up to his full height and trembling with various emotions, “my friend, Captain Freiherr von Eckstein will call upon you in an hour’s time, when you will no doubt be so good as to refer him to some friend of yours.”

“*Diantre!*” murmured M. Percier, when he was left to ruminate in solitude over the above bellicose announcement, “here is a pretty piece of imbecility! And where, I wonder, am I to

look for a friend in this abominable German-Swiss hotel?"

As if in answer to his question, there appeared at this moment through the fast-falling darkness the form of a certain young Frenchman who was somewhat stealthily making his way towards Seelisberg from the shores of the lake, where he had disembarked.

"My dear Eugène!" exclaimed M. Percier, with quite unexpected joyfulness and cordiality, "you fall from heaven!"

M. Caragnon, considerably taken aback, stammered out something about leave from regimental duty and the hotels of Switzerland being open to everybody. He added that he had no desire to intrude upon acquaintances who might find his presence objectionable.

"Intrude!" echoed M. Percier reproachfully, "for what, then, do you take me? Is it conceivable that the presence of a friend and a compatriot among outlandish barbarians could, in any case, be regarded as an intrusion? In the actual case it is, as I say, a direct gift from heaven. I will explain the actual case to you in two words."

He proceeded to explain it in a good many words, during the utterance of which his hearer surreptitiously rubbed a pair of gleeful hands. M. Percier and Professor Rothkopf might or

might not be bound to meet in deadly combat—that would be a matter for subsequent consultation—but, whether or no, the goose of Herr Hans was evidently cooked.

“It is a most deplorable incident,” Caragnon solemnly remarked, on the conclusion of the recital; “and what adds to its gravity is that it must, I fear, put an end to the matrimonial project which I understand that you had in view with regard to Mademoiselle Percier and the son of this ruffianly Prussian.”

“No such monstrous project exists! I forbid you to allude to it!” cried M. Percier indignantly. Then, remembering himself, he resumed with more composure: “I may have had notions; I do not deny that I have. But the time is not ripe yet for giving effect to notions of that elevated but premature character. What is for the moment essential is that I should teach a lesson in manners to a self-satisfied pedant who has insulted me and my country grossly. The misfortune is that I doubt whether I could hit a house at twenty paces with a pistol-bullet, and I have completely forgotten the little that I ever knew about the art of fencing.”

“Place yourself unreservedly in my hands, dear sir,” returned Caragnon reassuringly; “I have some experience in these matters, and you may

rely upon it that your honour and the honour of France will be safe with me."

That might be so, M. Percier somewhat ruefully mused; but it did not necessarily follow that his skin was safe, or that the hide of the arrogant Prussian was in any danger of being pierced. However, it was at least something to have secured an experienced second, and he confined himself to addressing a recommendation of discretion and strict secrecy to the latter.

The upshot of the above colloquy was that M. Caragnon found himself closeted, an hour later, with Baron von Eckstein, a tall, fair-haired Brandenburger, who chanced to be sojourning in the hotel, and who had felt constrained to respond to the appeal of his learned fellow-countryman.

"Of course," Caragnon began, "the whole affair is ridiculous. We cannot allow two old men who would be more likely to hit their seconds than one another to meet."

Herr von Eckstein, with a shrug of his shoulders, agreed that it was ridiculous. "It is also," he remarked, "quite irregular. There should, for instance, be four of us here, instead of two, to discuss preliminaries; but the truth is that I do not know where to lay my hand, amongst these tourists, upon a possible colleague."

“And I, then!—who arrive this moment from Paris?”

“Exactly so. Under the circumstances, I beg to intimate, on behalf of my principal, that we are prepared to accept an apology.”

“But, unfortunately, we are not prepared to offer one. Indeed, I scarcely see how we could be satisfied with excuses—much less make them. Insults, I must remind you, have been addressed not only to us but to France.”

The German shrugged his shoulders again. “Oh, if you take up that ground——”

“Really, I have no choice; I cannot regard the quarrel as a purely private matter. But may I suggest, M. le Baron, that since irregularity is inevitable, we should carry it a step farther and leave our absurd principals out of account?”

The other stared.

“Are you proposing that we should fight in their place, you and I?”

“Why not? I represent France, whose nose has been pulled; yours is the slapped face of Germany. I should have preferred, I confess, to call out Herr Hans, who is a typical blockhead of the nation to which the professor and you belong; but, in his absence, it gives me much pleasure to treat you as a substitute for the Rothkopfs, *père et fils*.”

At this Freiherr von Eckstein coloured up and cleared his throat. What followed was absolutely incorrect and (which was much worse) perhaps a trifle ludicrous into the bargain; still he could not consent to be put out of countenance by the levity of an impertinent Gaul. In a word, M. de Caragnon and he set forth for Lucerne shortly after daybreak the next morning, and, having purchased a couple of *fleurets de combat*, proceeded to fight a duel in the neighbourhood of that town, without seconds and with no other witness than a Swiss surgeon, whom they prevailed upon, much against his will, to accompany them to the field of battle.

The antagonists were very equally matched, and the baron, whose blood was up, would not hear of retiring after he had been touched on the shoulder; but when, a minute later, M. de Caragnon was run clean through the forearm, the doctor took it upon himself to stop the fray. The French gentleman, he declared, was no longer in a condition to fight; honour had been satisfied, and any attempt to renew hostilities would, in his opinion, be equivalent to culpable homicide. In fact, his duty would compel him to denounce it as such, and he intimated that, by uplifting his voice, he could have both his patients taken into prompt custody. So they begged him to be so good as to dress their wounds, instead of waking the echoes with an in-

opportune *jodel*; after which they shook hands, exchanged compliments and breakfasted together amicably enough at the Schweitzerhof.

Meanwhile, the fiery foes who should by that time have been shedding one another's blood upon the peaceful heights of Seelisberg were anything but happy. Of course, they had not slept very well: how could men of a certain age and of conciliatory principles be expected to sleep well under such circumstances? Of course, too, solitary reflection had made it only too evident to them both that they had made shocking fools of themselves, and of course they wished with all their hearts that they had never met. Met, however, they had, and very shortly they must meet again, with swords or pistols in their unskilled hands. Therefore, as may be imagined, their first care, on descending from their respective bedrooms, was to inquire after their respective representatives. Those gentlemen, they ascertained, had departed by the early boat for Lucerne—doubtless in search of lethal weapons. Prompt and thoughtful of them, in one sense, perhaps, yet a little thoughtless in another; for they might have remembered the inevitable embarrassment of the midday *déjeuner*, which must bring together two deadly enemies, whose enmity it was imperative to conceal from the ladies.

With downcast eyes and scant appetite was that repast partaken of by the severed philosophers; but if the ladies divined that something was amiss, they did not, fortunately, suspect the gruesome truth. One of them, indeed, having foreseen a quarrel upon which she had every reason to congratulate herself, was secretly overjoyed, and had some ado to disguise her satisfaction. However, she had no satisfaction to disguise when, in the course of the afternoon, she descried Hans Rothkopf marching towards the shady bench whither she had betaken herself with a book, in obedience to her father's request that he might be left to write undisturbed. The youth's determined mien led her to fear that a formal offer of marriage was about to be addressed to her, and she was not reassured by his petition for a brief audience. But his first words, after a curt and ungracious assent had been accorded to him, were, at all events, reassuring, if somewhat unexpected.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "I do not love you."

"Monsieur," she replied, as soon as she had recovered a little from her surprise, "I beg you to believe that I am not enamoured of you."

"*C'est entendu !* Nevertheless, you must be aware that our parents desire us to marry, and although do not presume to assert that you would obey Percier no matter what his commands might

will own that I shrink from defying my father, upon whom I am entirely dependent, and who appears to me to be in a very bad temper to-day."

"Which is to say?"

"Which is to say, mademoiselle, that the case is one for the exercise of a little harmless diplomacy. We are agreed—is it not so?—that nothing will ever induce us to become man and wife. But if I were to draw back or if you were to refuse, we should expose ourselves to trouble and reproaches which may, I think, be very easily avoided. If we were to affect willing submission and leave the responsibility of a rupture to our elders? I only take the liberty of suggesting this course because I perceive that my father and yours will certainly fall out before long. Unless I am very much mistaken, they came to high words over political questions last night; and why should we open a way of retreat for them when, by simply allowing things to take their course, we may count upon eventual release and apologies?"

"M. Rothkopf," answered Marthe, "I feel that I, at all events, owe you an apology. You are both more intelligent and more disinterested than I gave you credit for being, and if I did not abhor your whole nation——"

"Mademoiselle, you cannot—between ourselves—abhor it more than I do yours!"

"A la bonne heure ! Then let us make friends, since we must always be enemies !"

She held out her hand, in token of the good faith of this oddly worded compact, and Hans was in the act of raising it gratefully and respectfully to his lips when M. Percier suddenly appeared from behind a belt of adjacent pines. The spectacle was of a nature to infuriate an already overburdened philosopher, and poor M. Percier exploded like a bombshell.

"I forbid you to kiss my daughter's hand, sir ! How dare you permit yourself such a freedom without my consent ? How dare you ?"

"I am at your orders, monsieur," said the meek Hans, drawing himself up and bringing his heels together with a click.

"Then my orders are that you instantly withdraw, and that you do not venture to approach Mademoiselle Percier again until I give you leave. Which will be never, sir—never !"

Hans waited for no second dismissal, and M. Percier, with tears in his voice, turned upon his too obedient daughter.

"Unhappy girl ! Do you wish to break my heart, then ?"

"Have you ever asked yourself whether there was not some danger of your breaking mine ?"

"By refusing to let you ally yourself with one of the murderers of your country !"

"No; by planning to make me do that very thing. It is with one of the defenders of my country that I should ally myself, if I were free to choose; but since you will have nothing to say to soldiers——"

M. Percier embraced his daughter tenderly. "My dear child, I breathe again! I have—let me confess it at once—been guilty of a stupid error; I have attempted to anticipate a state of affairs which I obviously cannot live to witness, however desirable it may be from an abstract point of view. These Germans are impossible!—and will remain so until they have been put back into the place that befits them. In the event of my death—which may be nearer than you think for—you must marry a Frenchman; I implore and adjure you to do so! Even though his profession should be the entirely honourable one of arms, to which our friend Eugène Caragnon, for example, is committed."

The shadow of his friend Eugène Caragnon fell between him and the sinking sun, and checked further eloquence. The young man, who wore his right arm in a sling, and who looked a little pale, did not speak; but Freiherr von Eckstein, who stood beside him, had news which could not be accounted unwelcome to impart.

"We come," this gallant officer announced,

“from informing Professor Rothkopf of what it is now our duty to inform you, sir—namely, that the affair which you were pleased to place in our hands has been adjusted. The professor has been so good as to express himself satisfied with the manner in which we have dealt with it, and we shall be glad to receive a similar assurance from your lips.”

The requested assurance was not immediately forthcoming. M. Percier, who, as soon as he recognised von Eckstein, had hurriedly drawn the latter aside, felt bound to protest against the inadmissible pretension of a second to assume the part of a principal; but it was gravely pointed out to him that, having appointed M. Caragnon to act on his behalf, he must accept his representative's decision. Perhaps he was not altogether sorry to get the worst of a prolonged argument and to be convinced that, since Professor Rothkopf had acquiesced in a vicarious combat, he had no choice but to do likewise. Meanwhile, M. Caragnon, left in the background with Mademoiselle Marthe, was offering explanations to which it may be conjectured that no serious objection was taken.

On the following day M. Percier, accompanied by his daughter and their wounded compatriot, quitted Seelisberg. The place, it was felt, was not quite large enough to hold two disputants

who cherished identical theories, yet who might, at any moment, fly once more at one another's throats, and a conference which had conspicuously failed in its chief objects was best broken off.

"The education of the world," M. Percier declared oratorically, as he stood on the sunny deck of the steamer, "is still lamentably in arrear. If I consent—not unwillingly—to bestow my daughter upon a Frenchman and a fighting man, it is because I am forced to acknowledge that education must come in the future, as it always has in the past, from France, and that it cannot, unfortunately, yet dispense with the aid of fire and sword. I, and those who look forward as I do, must rest satisfied with proclaiming the great truth that all men are brothers."

"And," murmured the submissive Marthe under her breath, "with allowing inferior beings to fight their battles for them."

But it may be hoped that this irreverent and irrelevant comment upon a noble pronouncement did not reach the philosopher's ears.

A PRÉFET OF THE SECOND EMPIRE

M. LE BARON LEBEAU DE MONTIGNY was the style and designation by which he used to be known in the days of his youth and the days of his glory; though I believe his claim to the last two words of that high-sounding appellation would not have borne too close a scrutiny. I presume, however, that he was an authentic baron, and he had the clearest right, both inherited and personal, to the first of his names. He was, indeed, commonly called *le beau Préfet* at that now distant epoch, and enjoyed a certain celebrity by reason of his magnificent stature, his handsome, olive-complexioned face, and those large dark-brown eyes of his which would doubtless have achieved innumerable conquests, but for the man's queer shyness and modesty. I am not aware that he possessed any other title to fame or distinction—save, to be sure, that of being the beautiful Madame de Montigny's husband.

No doubt it was because he was the husband

of a lady who had adorned (rather too conspicuously adorned, some people said) the Imperial Court that he had been made *Préfet* of a certain southern department of France, and that he was privileged to spend money so lavishly in entertaining the aristocracy, resident and exotic, of Arleville. I call the place Arleville because it is necessary for present purposes to confer some pseudonym upon it. A quarter of a century or more ago, it was the gayest and brightest of little towns during the winter months, attracting hosts of foreigners by its charming climate and the beauty of its natural surroundings. The climate, I am assured, has not changed for the worse, nor have the everlasting hills shifted their position; visitors also are stated to be more numerous than ever. But it would be difficult to persuade me that any place or any people can be quite as bright and gay now as of yore. That, of course, only means that I have been young and now am old. I regret to add that in other respects my experience has not altogether coincided with that of the Psalmist, and if it be contended that the officials of the Second Empire were an evil and corrupt crew who richly deserved the ruin which overtook most of them, all I can say is that some very decent fellows were, to my knowledge, numbered in their ranks. Decent fellows are, in

truth, to be found almost everywhere ; one's position in life is so seldom the result of one's personal choice!

Lebeau, at all events, would never, I feel sure, have been a Préfet of his own free will, although he looked the part well enough when he donned his showy uniform, and although he discharged his social duties with an amiability which went far towards atoning for the obvious fact that they bored him horribly. Madame, for her part, entertained indefatigably, but did not trouble herself to be amiable to everybody. She allowed it to be known that she considered herself in exile when away from Paris (she really was in a sort of temporary exile, I was told, owing to certain indiscretions of which everybody, except her husband, seemed to be aware), and an occasional bow, resembling a nod, was as much as provincials or obscure foreigners, like myself, could expect to obtain from her. Sundry distinguished Russians, a few Parisians, wintering in the south, and one or two titled young officers, quartered at Arleville, were more highly favoured. She was a singularly beautiful and graceful woman, with her chestnut hair, her half-closed blue eyes, and the semi-regal airs which she affected ; and as I was then much too young a man to be affronted by the circumstance that she never took the slightest notice of me, I admired her prodigiously.

My admiration was evidently shared by a person who was fully entitled to admire her, as well as by several persons who were not. At the *Préfecture* balls I often noticed our host, propping himself up against the wall, talking to nobody, and contemplating his wife's movements with a serene pride and beatitude which to some of the bystanders must, no doubt, have appeared supremely ridiculous. He had, I was assured by those who were acquainted with him, absolutely no conversation; he only danced under compulsion, and then about as badly as it was possible to dance.

Now, it so happened that I myself, being but a poor performer, though fond of dancing, was somewhat diffident about soliciting partners, and thus I often found myself standing out, while my friends were more agreeably employed. One evening, not a little to my surprise, the *Préfet* sidled up and accosted me in a friendly, confidential tone.

"This does not amuse you too well, monsieur?" said he. "We should be able to sympathise with one another; for God knows how far it is from amusing me!"

For the moment I was quite confused by the unexpected honour of being so addressed; I was scarcely more than a boy, and in those days, I had a high idea of the dignity and importance of official personages. But it was impossible to feel

embarrassed for long in the company of this good-humoured and unassuming creature. If he had nothing to say to fine ladies, he could be almost garrulous with a young Englishman, who did not intimidate him, and many of whose tastes, as it presently transpired, were identical with his own. He was an enthusiastic sportsman, he told me, and notwithstanding the modesty with which he spoke of his achievements, I soon perceived that he was entitled to give that description of himself. He listened with much interest to what I had to tell him about sport in England. I daresay that at that callow stage of my existence I may have been of opinion that nobody outside my own country really knew much about guns and horses; if so, the insular arrogance was destined to be taken out of me ere long by the Baron Lebeau de Montigny, who was a far surer and cleaner shot than I was then, or have since become. Of his horsemanship I cannot speak quite so highly; but he had at any rate that indispensable requisite of courage without which it is useless for any man, whether French or English, to get on a horse's back. The freemasonry which exists amongst all who have a common love of open-air pursuits made speedy friends of us, and I well remember how, on the conclusion of a cotillon, in which neither of us had taken any active part, the beautiful Madame de

Montigny deigned for the first time to address me.

"But you are astonishing, monsieur," said she, with a faint, ironical smile; "you have actually succeeded in keeping Fernand awake until two o'clock in the morning!"

"*Mon amie*," the *Préfet* hastened to explain, "Mr Lambert has shot red deer in Scotland, and I know not how many thousand grouse upon the moors of Yorkshire."

"*Oh, alors*," she returned, with a laugh and a shrug of her white shoulders, "*tout est dit!*"

He did not call me Mr Lambert, but "M. Lambert," pronouncing my patronymic after the French fashion—a thing which he could never do without a brief, involuntary snigger. There was at that time a Gallic joke connected with the name of Lambert and derived from some *café-chantant* ballad or other—*Où est Lambert?—avez vous vu Lambert?* I have no more idea of what it meant than I have of similar slang phrases which obtain periodical currency on this side of the Channel; but it often came in appropriately, and M. de Montigny, who was as easy to amuse in some ways as he was difficult in others, invariably chuckled when he found himself called upon to mention my name. He used to apologise for chuckling, and to accuse himself of being atro-

ciously *mal élevé*; but my feelings were not hurt. We Britons have our defects (and if we remain ignorant of any of them the fault assuredly does not lie with our foreign critics); but I think that we stand chaff good-humouredly.

Well, from that day forth, if any young officer of the Arleville garrison chanced to inquire facetiously, "*Où est Lambert?*" the answer, "*A la Préfecture,*" came readily enough. In spite of disparity of age and social standing, I was soon the intimate associate — perhaps the only intimate associate — of the master of that luxurious establishment, who was himself more like a grown-up schoolboy than a solemn, responsible functionary. He had some very fair horses in his stable, and we used to ride cross-country races, which I generally won, against one another over the heathery moorlands which rise behind the town. Also we had one or two days of capital quail-shooting together, when he turned the tables on me. More distant expeditions into the mountains, in pursuit of nobler game, were planned, but had to be repeatedly postponed, owing to pressure of public business. For the times were growing ticklish in more ways than one; the stability of the Imperial throne was not what it had been, and reports from the provinces were continually being demanded *à propos* of everything and nothing.

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"I do not know what these gentlemen wish me to say," the *Préfet* would declare. "I tell them that an excellent feeling prevails, and that I receive assurances from the mayors which leave nothing to be desired; but if they dream of increasing their popularity by establishing a more liberal and representative form of government, I think they make a mistake. They would do better, in my opinion, to pick a quarrel with the King of Prussia and offer the nation the results of a successful campaign. *Enfin!* — what do I know about politics?"

There is every reason to believe that he knew very little indeed. Possibly, if he had known more, he would not have been where he was; for a despotism is apt to be ill served by those who have contracted the vexatious habit of thinking for themselves. I sometimes wondered whether he was aware or not that he owed his actual position solely to his wife, who was reputed to possess great influence in high quarters; but I am sure now that he was aware of nothing at all—not, at any rate, of what was so patent to the rest of his little world—and that if those who compassionated him were justified in so doing, they were by no means justified in despising him.

One notes with stupefaction the conquests

achieved by such men as the Comte de Saint-Péray, a by no means admirable officer of hussars, who was no longer in his first youth, and whose methods of laying siege to hearts were not, to my mind, by any means attractive. He had brought with him, however, from Paris the reputation of being both irresistible and cynically fickle. It may have been the latter alleged attribute which first recommended him to the favour of *Madame la Préfète*; for she was herself accustomed to success in the field where he had won his laurels, and perhaps she was a little tired of easy victories. Be that as it may, she had, at the time when I became a constant visitor under her roof, reduced this hero to what bore all the appearance of a state of abject slavery. When I spoke of his conquests just now, I did not mean to imply that he had conquered Madame de Montigny, who, on the contrary, seemed to have conquered him; but as he spent the whole of his spare time in her company, Arleville, naturally, drew its own conclusions, and these were of a nature to expose *Monsieur le Préfet* to covert sneers of which he remained blissfully unconscious. The fact, I suppose, was that, in his eyes, his adored wife, like the king, could do no wrong, and his faith in her must, by all accounts, have been unshakable to have

survived the severe tests which had already been laid upon it.

"That Saint-Péray is a lucky fellow," he remarked musingly one day while we were driving back towards Arleville from one of our shooting expeditions—"a very lucky fellow!"

I replied that I had been given to understand as much.

"He has deserved his luck, *bien entendu*," my companion resumed; "but that does not alter the fact that he has had it. To have seen all the fighting that there has been since he first put on a uniform; to have distinguished himself in Mexico and in Africa——"

"And to have escaped without a scratch!" I interpolated.

"Oh, as for that, I imagine that he is as willing as another to take his share of wounds. For the rest, he has given his proofs, and will give them again, no doubt. That is why I envy him and call him lucky. *Il n'y a que ça, voyez-vous*. I grant you that there must be civilians as well as soldiers in every country; but the highest honours belong to the soldiers—as is only just."

He went on to lament that he had not adopted a military career in preference to one for which he had few qualifications; and he looked pleased when I remarked that he had, at all events, as

much pluck as any warrior could need. He pointed out, however, that the not very uncommon virtue of intrepidity must have some opportunity of displaying itself before it can expect to be recognised.

"You and I, my dear Lambert," he was pleased to remark, "are not cowards; but it is very possible that we may go down to our graves without ever having done anything to convince the world that we are brave men. And when one is absolutely devoid of every other merit——"

He shrugged his shoulders and left his sentence unfinished. He had plenty of other merits, and, as a matter of fact, opportunities have since been afforded him for demonstrating his possession of that one; but the world has omitted to clap its hands. Perhaps, however, he was not at the moment thinking so much about the world at large as about a lady who often spoke in laudatory language of M. de Saint-Péray's prowess.

Nevertheless, he was not in the least jealous. I remember that on that very evening when we reached the Préfecture, we found the gallant officer in question seated on a stool at Madame de Montigny's feet, and that both she and he looked slightly taken aback, for we had not been expected to return before the following morning. But the loyal Fernand exhibited no sign of dis-

pleasure or disquietude. He said laughingly—and with perfect sincerity, I don't doubt—that he was delighted to find himself so admirably replaced; he begged Saint-Péray to stay to dinner, and looked as pleased as possible when his invitation was accepted. It must really have been rather poor sport to hoodwink so blind a mortal, and I fancy that Madame de Montigny was almost provoked with him, convenient though his blindness no doubt was. Saint-Péray, for his part, had the air of being a trifle ashamed. He had, I believe, fought many duels with aggrieved husbands, and very likely he would have felt more comfortable if there had been any prospect of his exchanging shots with his friend the *Préfet*: such prospects enable a man to retain his self-respect—or some equivalent sentiment.

Meanwhile, I am not prepared to affirm that any legitimate excuse for a hostile encounter existed. Madame de Montigny alternately encouraged and repelled her admirer—a time-honoured process which seldom fails to bring about the desired results—and perhaps she was in no hurry to put an end to a state of things so flattering to her vanity. Arleville chattered; but I imagine that the chatter of Arleville left her supremely indifferent. What, as I gathered, she was quite unable to regard with indifference was the spending of

a whole summer in those southern latitudes, and she loudly bewailed the official responsibilities which compelled her to do so. These may have been—and her husband, who urged her to betake herself to Trouville for the hot months, as usual, declared that they were—wholly imaginary; but she averred impatiently that it would be expected of her to remain at her post.

I daresay Madame de Montigny and her husband had their respective parts to play in securing that overwhelming majority by which, soon afterwards, the French nation proclaimed its approval of a revised Imperial Constitution. The *Préfet*, I am sure, discharged himself of what he conceived to be his duty, while Madame, after her brilliant successes at the Tuileries and Compiègne, could do no less than back him up. M. de Saint-Péray, who belonged to an old Legitimist family, but wore the Emperor's uniform, was doubtless willing to assist the lady to the best of his ability. But politics had as little interest for me in those days as for my excellent Lebeau, and really I know nothing of what took place under his auspices after I left Arleville in the spring. It was time to go home, and all the winter visitants had either departed or were packing up; but I, unlike them, contemplated a speedy return.

“Why should you not run out to us for a few

weeks in July—you, who have nothing to do but amuse yourself?" my fellow-sportsman had asked me. "I will take a fortnight's leave of absence, and if there are any bears in the mountains, we will pay our respects to them. Failing bears, we will find other game. In any case, we shall have the joy of sleeping under the stars and escaping the postman. *Est-ce entendu?*"

I assented to a project which sounded rather enticing to me—the more willingly because Madame de Montigny was graciously pleased to associate herself with her husband's hospitable entreaties. Fernand, she said, would never have the energy to organise an expedition which would be the best thing in the world for his health unless he were provided with a companion, and the young men of Arleville were too lazy to join him.

M. de Saint-Péray, who happened to be present, remarked coolly that somebody must remain behind, if only to execute Madame's commissions. Both his speech and his manner struck me as impertinent; but apparently they did not so strike Madame de Montigny's husband, who laughed heartily and replied, "I make you welcome to that privilege, *mon garçon!* It will keep you busy, I promise you."

Very likely it did; for Madame de Montigny delighted in making him run errands, and doubt-

less she had ample opportunity of tyrannising over him in that way during the early part of the dull season. But, as I said before, I don't know what took place in the little southern city after I had exchanged its social attractions for those of London. Only, as the so-called dull season progressed, and as the date fixed upon for our sporting excursion drew near, it became evident that, so far as public affairs were concerned, French *Préfets* must be having anything but a dull time of it.

When I passed through Paris, on my way to keep an appointment of which I had received more than one epistolary reminder, I was assured by those who ought to have known, that the war-scare was a thing of the past. The Prussians, I was told, did not want war and were not ready for it; Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern had withdrawn his objectionable candidature for the throne of Spain, and the only danger was that the French, who did want war and were ready, might get out of hand. Diplomacy, however, relied confidently upon the Executive to allay popular passions.

"Go in peace," said one of my well-informed informants laughingly. "Unless you shoot your *Préfet* or he shoots you, there will be no international bloodshed on French soil this year."

Despite this reassuring prophecy, I lingered a

few days in Paris, thinking that, after all, there was perhaps going to be a row, and that, if so, it would be a pity to miss it. I was as eager to participate in rows a quarter of a century ago as I am to keep clear of them now. Thus it came to pass that I witnessed some interesting historical scenes; thus, too, I was enabled to reach Arleville on the very day of the declaration of war. There could be no earthly risk in seeking a spot so remote from the frontier, nor was it likely that the outbreak of hostilities would prevent an over-worked official from taking a brief holiday. So, at all events, I was led to believe.

But my friend the *Préfet*, though delighted to see me and as warm in his welcome as I could have desired him to be, did not seem to think that there was any immediate prospect of our hunting the reluctant bear together. I found him greatly excited and agitated, as well as very busy, and he declared that he had more work to do than he could get through in twelve solid working hours out of the twenty-four.

"But that will pass," he observed with a sigh. "*La parole est aux canons*, and soon we shall be reduced—we unhappy civilians—to the rank of mere helpless spectators. It is neither glorious nor dignified; but what would you have? At least the march of our victorious armies will be

a spectacle better worth watching than the Constitutional experiments of M. Émile Ollivier."

He had no misgivings with regard to that forthcoming victorious march; only it was a chagrin to him to be precluded from taking part in it. Madame de Montigny, less enthusiastic, and perhaps less sanguine (for I subsequently heard that she, like other hangers-on of the luckless Emperor, was under no illusion as to the magnitude of the task which had been undertaken), spoke shudderingly of the horrors of war and lamented that it should have been found impossible to arrive at a pacific solution.

"You talk at your ease!" she remarked to her husband, shrugging her shoulders rather disdainfully; "you risk neither your own skin nor that of anybody who is dear to you."

It was not a very kind speech, seeing that the poor man asked nothing better than to make a target of himself for the bullets of the enemy; but he did not seem to resent it. It was but natural, he said, that women should feel as his wife felt; he added that it was likewise touching and admirable.

I could not myself discover anything particularly touching or admirable in the lady's attitude; but it may have been, and I daresay it was, quite natural that she should deplore the departure of

her admirer in chief, who had been appointed to serve on the staff of some general whose name does not come back to me. A day or two after my installation at the Préfecture, where I was entreated to remain for at least a week, upon the chance of carrying out our original programme, I encountered M. de Saint-Péray, hurrying towards the garden which I had just quitted, and had the honour of bidding him goodbye. For he was upon the point of leaving for the seat of war, he told me, and had come to make his adieux to Madame de Montigny. I very considerably offered to conduct him to the tent on the lawn under which I knew that she was seated; but he declined my good offices with less affability than might have been expected from so well-bred a man, stating that he knew his way about the premises well enough to be independent of a guide. There was no colour in his cheeks, I noticed, and the hand which he extended to meet mine was cold, notwithstanding the oppressive heat of the weather. I take it that he must have been genuinely enamoured of a woman who, as far as my observation served, had very little genuine about her composition, physical or mental. That, however, was no business of mine, and the *Préfet*, fortunately, had business of another kind which was likely to keep him at his writing-table

until dinner-time. What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over; no greater blessing than short sight can be desired for the husbands of such ladies as Madame de Montigny; and since Saint-Péray was off to the wars it might be hoped that he and his goings-on would never again afford excitement to the gossips of Arleville. With these and similar philosophic reflections I beguiled an hour or more, while I sauntered about the ill-paved, malodorous streets beneath a white umbrella and a blazing sun. I thought I had better let them have an hour. It seemed a sufficiently liberal allowance; and anybody who knows what the paving-stones of Arleville are like on a sultry summer afternoon will admit, I am sure, that I could not have allowed them much more. It will be urged, perhaps, that nothing compelled me to return to the garden on the conclusion of my walk, and that the vast, cool *salons* of the Préfecture, with their closed *persiennes*, remained open to me. Well, that is true, of course, and at my present advanced age I know better, I hope, than to intrude, under any circumstances, upon anybody; but I was very young in the year 1870, and my own company was far from having the charm for me which I am glad to say that it has since acquired.

Towards the garden, therefore, I bent my indiscreet steps, and a lucky thing it was that one

of Madame de Montigny's recent extravagances had been the turfing of what, under the rule of her predecessors had, I believe, been a bare and arid expanse. For this deadened the sound of my approach, and preserved both me and others from being put to prompt and ludicrous confusion. It was in rosy confusion, I own, that I beat a hasty retreat from the neighbourhood of Madame de Montigny's pretty, striped tent. I had seen what I had no business to see, and I devoutly thanked Providence for enabling me to withdraw unperceived.

Nowadays, if by chance I were to catch sight of an unauthorised arm encircling a lady's waist, and of that lady's head reposing upon an unauthorised shoulder, I should suppress an elderly chuckle, I suppose, turn on my heel and think no more about it. I am forty-eight years old, and it is no longer in the power of my fellow-creatures to surprise or shock me. It was otherwise at that remote epoch when Prince Bismarck so successfully shocked and surprised the Emperor Napoleon III. It is true that Madame de Montigny's flirtation with Saint-Péray was no secret to me; still there is always a shade of difference between what one knows to be the case and what one has beheld with one's own eyes. Moreover, I hated then, and don't like

even now, to receive indisputable evidence of the fact that women are no better than we are. They really ought to be better; and if they are not, they might at least endeavour to keep up a pleasing illusion which for so many centuries has helped to make the world go round. Of course there is not the slightest use of my saying so; but I will take this opportunity, nevertheless, of proclaiming my humble conviction that every woman who causes a young man to think contemptuously of her sex, incurs graver and wider responsibilities than she suspects.

However, I apologise for digressing into a sort of sermon, when all I meant to say was that I ingenuously blushed for two persons who were probably incapable of blushing for themselves. I may add that my heart bled for my poor, stupid, confiding *Préfet*, who had spoken to me that very morning with gratitude and admiration of his wife's refusal to leave Arleville in those anxious times. She had declared, he told me, that the times were such as to call for some sacrifice on the part of every man and woman in France, and she had already assembled a number of ladies who had undertaken, at her instance, to begin preparing lint and other necessities for the wounded. One now divined her motive for remaining at Arleville, and one foresaw that she would soon

be found willing to tear up lint in some less deserted spot.

No spot could have looked more deserted than the principal *salon* of the Préfecture, whither I betook myself after my ill-timed descent into the garden. I was contrasting its actual silence and darkened solitude with the brilliant aspect which it had worn during the bygone winter months, and I was asking myself whether, after all, I had not better show the place a clean pair of heels, when one of the doors opened and the *Préfet* entered. He carried a sheaf of telegrams in his hand and had the appearance of being very tired, very hot and a good deal worried. But a smile broke out upon his face when he caught sight of his dejected guest.

"My poor friend," he exclaimed, "I owe you a thousand apologies! It is unpardonable to leave you all alone from morning to night, and I am sure you must be repenting of your amiability in having undertaken a detestable journey only for this! But courage! we will shoot a bear between us yet. It is only during these first few days, when everything seems to have got into a tangle, that it is out of the question for me to place subordinates in charge. Presently we shall be left behind, as it were, in a desert, and I shall have nothing to do. For the moment," he added,

glancing ruefully at his telegrams, "I have a little too much."

Just by way of saying something, I asked him whether military preparations were in a tangle; whereupon he threw up his hands and shook his head.

"One would imagine so," he replied, "from the messages which I receive and the impossible questions which are put to me! But perhaps it is always like that at the opening of a campaign—what do I know? Saint-Péray would be able to tell you, if he were not already on his way to join the dance—happy fellow! I thought he would have looked in at my office to bid me good-bye; but no doubt he has been too busy."

I thought of mentioning that M. de Saint-Péray had called at the Préfecture in the course of the afternoon, but decided to refrain. Most likely he was still in the garden, and, if so, the less said about him the better.

"And Gabrielle?" resumed my unsuspecting friend, after a pause—"what has become of her?"

"Madame de Montigny was sitting out on the lawn an hour or two ago," I replied evasively.

"Then she will not have moved; for she is not in the house, and the coachman, I hear, has had no orders. Suppose we join her; I have some telegrams here which it will interest her to read."

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Nobody but a downright imbecile would have attempted, under such circumstances, to dissuade a husband from seeking out his wife. A sensible man would, of course, have assented cheerfully and, on nearing the tent, would have been seized with such a vociferous fit of coughing as would have sufficed to place guilty persons in conventional attitudes. But so far, I regret to say, was I from behaving like a rational being that I completely lost my head, and begged the *Préfet* on no account to intrude upon Madame de Montigny's solitude. She would not like it, I declared; probably she had fallen asleep; it would startle her to be disturbed. Such, in short, was my skilful tact that I succeeded at last in alarming one who, heaven knows, was not very readily alarmed.

"What do you mean, Lambert?" he ended by inquiring with knitted brows. "You are concealing something—what is it?"

I protested that I had nothing to conceal; and I daresay my countenance gave the lie to my protestations. At all events I was presently compelled to accompany him downstairs into the garden, where I had not even the presence of mind to bark or sneeze. I could only trust that Saint-Péray had quitted the tent towards which my friend hastily strode. But Fate—always a blind, stupid force

—had not yet thought proper to dismiss that amorous warrior; nor, I imagine, was Madame de Montigny agile enough in her movements to save the situation.

Being a few yards in the rear, I did not see what the *Préfet* saw; but he staggered back, with a choking ejaculation and a look of horror and amazement on his face which told their own tale. A tragi-comic scene ensued. There was a good deal more of tragedy than comedy in it, but the latter element was not wanting. It very seldom is in cases of that description. Madame de Montigny, who emerged from the tent, followed by her admirer, was a little frightened, but not, so far as I could judge, in the least ashamed; Saint-Péray, smiling and imperturbable, was equal to an occasion which was probably not without parallel in his experience; but the injured and astounded husband was, I fear, rather ridiculous. He raved incoherently; he shook his ten fingers in his rival's face; he appealed insanely to his wife to say that his eyes had deceived him.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle! *dis-moi donc que ce n'est pas vrai!*"

Gabrielle did not, apparently, think it worth while to make so preposterous an assertion, and the unhappy man threw up his arms despairingly.

A moment later he was writhing and struggling

on the ground in a fit. The servants were summoned ; a doctor was sent for ; he was carried into the house, where he remained very ill all through the night, but recovered consciousness and was pronounced out of danger on the morrow. And on the morrow, seeing no alternative course open to me, I fled. Saint-Péray, I ascertained, had also departed—as indeed he must have been compelled to do—and I never heard what became of him, or of the Baron Lebeau de Montigny, or of Madame la Baronne, for whose unworthy sake one of them seemed destined to kill the other. On one's journey through life one is perpetually coming across fragments of unfinished romances, which arouse a passing curiosity and are forgotten.

One of those vexatious little episodes of travel which never fail to excite the wrath of an irritable, elderly man befell me the other day. I was journeying southwards to join my wife and daughters, who were spending the winter at Cannes, and as I really cannot see where the luxury of the so-called *train de luxe* comes in, I had decided to sleep at a certain well-known town of central France. On reaching the station for which I was bound, I accordingly left the express and presented my *bulletin* at the baggage department—only to discover, after the customary exasperating delay, that

everything I possessed in the way of clothes and toilet requisites was being whirled at a high rate of speed towards Marseilles. That sort of thing is enough to make anybody swear. At all events, it was enough to make me swear, and I relieved my feelings by doing so. Furthermore, I demanded an immediate interview with the *Chef de Gare*. I did not, I remarked in my best French, want a lot of imbeciles to dance round me, assuring me that all would arrange itself; I had been temporarily deprived of the use of my property through the grossest carelessness and negligence, and I must insist upon stating my case to a responsible official.

Presently, therefore, the responsible functionary appeared upon the scene—an urbane, white-haired, white-moustached personage who, with his gold-laced cap in his hand, offered me apologies so ample and so polite that I myself was reduced to adopting an apologetic tone. I said it was rather infuriating to lose all one's things after having taken every precaution enjoined upon travellers by the P. L. M. Company to insure their safety, and he quite agreed that it was. But he would at once telegraph to the next stopping-place, and he hoped that within a few hours the missing articles would be returned to the station for which they had been labelled. Would I have the extreme goodness to favour him with

my name and address, so that my belongings, on their arrival, might be sent to the hotel which I proposed to patronise?

I told him my name, and I noticed that a quickly suppressed spasm of mirth contracted his lean, wrinkled countenance. He was evidently old enough to remember the days when one could not announce one's self as Lambert without making everybody in France titter. But he remembered more than that—more than I, for my part, remembered, even after he had gripped my limp, unresponsive hand with a cry of—

“*Dieu de Dieu!* it is the old Lambert of Arleville himself! But you do not recognise me—in effect, why should you?”

I stared at the man. “If it were not impossible,” I began hesitatingly, “I should almost believe that I was in the presence of M. Lebeau de Montigny.”

“De Montigny — no,” answered the *Chef de Gare*, smiling; “the Baron de Montigny did not survive the Empire. But Lebeau—very much at your service, my old friend.”

He added that he must postpone explanations until he had telegraphed for my luggage and had seen a mail train, which was nearly due, despatched for Paris; but he begged me to dine with him presently at a neighbouring restaurant, and, of

course, I could not have refused, even if I had wished to do so.

"You think me very much to be pitied, my friend," he remarked placidly, an hour or two later, when we were seated opposite to one another, with a couple of empty bottles of excellent Chambertin between us; "but that is where you make a mistake. It is quite as amusing to be a station-master as to be a *Préfet*; I have no cares; I am sure of my pension, and from time to time, when I get a holiday, I still shoulder my gun. I ask for nothing more."

He had already told me how, a quarter of a century before, he had shouldered a rifle for the defence of his country, and how, on the conclusion of peace, he had solicited and obtained employment on the railway. "I was literally without a *sou*," was his laughing explanation of this step; "I had spent the whole of my small patrimony at a post from which the Republic naturally hastened to remove me, and *ma foi*! if I had not had the good luck to take part in several successful skirmishes, God knows what would have become of me! As it was, I was considered to have a certain claim, and—*me voici*!"

Up to that moment he had made no allusion whatsoever to Madame de Montigny; but now he tranquilly observed: "You are wondering what

has become of the lady who was my wife twenty-five years ago. Well, the divorce law has come to our aid, and she is now the Comtesse de Saint-Péray—a *grande dame*, very influential, very rich (for her husband has inherited a large fortune) and much more Royalist than Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans. I bear no grudge against Saint-Péray, who, it must be owned, has behaved like a gallant man. At Versailles, where we met during the Commune, he gave me the satisfaction to which I was entitled, and did me the honour to plant a bullet in my shoulder—what more could he do, except to bestow his name and title upon one who——”

“Who had proved herself eminently worthy of being so distinguished,” I suggested, since he seemed to be in some doubt as to the fitting completion of his sentence.

“Precisely. And, between ourselves, my friend, it does not seem to me certain that I have the worst of the bargain. Life, you see, is like that—in youth one demands a host of things, most of which are not to be had; one must grow old in order to discover that nothing is worth making such a fuss about, and that the chief of all earthly blessings is peace. It is not I, believe me, who am resigned to a peace which has cost us two of our provinces; yet I sometimes hope that I shall

be in my grave before the war of revenge breaks out. What would you have? The past is past, and the present may easily be more anxious and troublesome than it is. Let us talk of something else."

We talked about a variety of other subjects—about sport, about my own commonplace history, which he insisted upon my relating to him in full detail, about former Arleville acquaintances of ours, who were dead, married, or ruined—until the hour came when his duties forced him to quit me.

"It is droll, all the same," he said, as he held my hand, "that we should have met again in this way." And he began to sing softly in a cracked voice :—

"C'est moi qui ai vu Lambert
A la gare du chemin de fer ! "

The white - aproned, bullet - headed waiter grinned. He did not, of course, recognise a *chanson* which can only be recollected by the elderly, and I daresay he considered that two bottles of Chambertin, followed by a *petit verre* apiece, were sufficient to account for one out of a pair of old gentlemen bursting into senile song. The truth is that M. Lebeau, who cannot be so very much over fifty years of age, looked quite seventy.



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My wife, to whom I subsequently narrated his vicissitudes of fortune, opines that his heart is broken; personally I incline to the belief that he has learnt, as he professes to have done, to appreciate the blessings of peace. May they be his a little longer! For indeed I do not think that any protracted extension of them will be required in his case.

IN GOOD FAITH

“**A**FTER all, the world is not an unpleasant place. A man has his worries and bothers, and if he expects to live from Sunday morning to Saturday night without any rubs, he must be a fool. But a little patience pulls one through, and when all's said and done, there are more good days than bad ones.”

It was Mr Preston, senior partner in the well-known firm of Preston and Preston, solicitors of Westhampton, who expressed this opinion, which came a little oddly from the lips of an old lawyer, and certainly did not agree in tone with those for which he was in the habit of charging six-and-eightpence. He did not, however, give utterance to it in his office, but in the garden of his pretty country-house at Lingwould, five good miles away from parchments and japanned boxes; and the hour was half-past eight on a still June evening, and the nightingales were singing and the roses were in bloom, and a decanter of Château-Margaux stood on the little table at his elbow, and, best of all, he was alone, so that he could talk any

nonsense that he pleased without danger of contradiction. He had, it is true, some special reasons for optimism at that moment; but even in default of these he might have been excused for thinking well of a world which had brought him nothing but prosperity. He had succeeded early in life to an excellent business, which by industry and integrity he had converted into a yet more excellent one; he had married a worthy woman, who had not only never given him the faintest cause to complain of her, but had provided him with an eldest son and partner of irreproachable merit; and now in his old age he was quite at liberty, if it so pleased him, to twirl his thumbs, drink his claret, and bud his roses, *procul negotiis*.

But it is a part of human nature to demand cares, and to create them if they will not come unbidden. Mr Preston, with plenty of money, with a sufficiency of occupation, with an attached and well-conducted family, and with robust health, had contrived to treat himself to the additional luxury of a standing anxiety in the person of his niece, Miss Violet Ripley, and her fortune. Neither the one nor the other should have disturbed him much, seeing that Miss Ripley, who was his ward as well as his niece, had always shown herself quite a model young lady, and

that a good round sum of money, becoming rounder year by year while waiting to be spent, cannot be counted among the evil things of life. But every medal has its reverse, and if a man be but determined to vex himself, he will generally carry out his purpose in this way or in that.

Violet Ripley, as a pretty little orphan, amply provided for, had not originally presented herself to her guardian in the light of an encumbrance or a trouble. Mayfield was a good-sized house, and a little girl to grow up among his own three sons, to soften their manners and not suffer them to become wild, was what no judicious parent could object to. It was when the little girl developed into a big girl, and her fortune, growing quietly with her growth, had reached the imposing total of 40,000*l.*, that Mr Preston began to see breakers ahead. No one had ever accused this upright gentleman and conscientious legal adviser of greed, and indeed Mrs Preston was wont to repeat to all who would listen to her that her husband was the best of men; yet, since even the best of men is not perfect, it may be admitted that he had the one small failing of being a little too fond of money. For his niece's personalty, which he had carefully nursed during so many years, he had acquired a quasi-paternal affection, and it went to his heart to think that, sooner or later, those

self-propagating guineas would have to be handed over to his niece's husband.

The first time that he conceived the notion of keeping them in the family he experienced a certain sensation of shame; but upon further reflection he asked himself, "Why not?" He was not going to coerce anybody; he would not even take upon him to offer advice; he would merely make a suggestion. And so, when Violet was nineteen and his eldest son Thomas had reached the age of eight-and-twenty, he pointed out to the latter that, with 40,000*l.* lying, so to speak, at one's feet, one need not be at the pains of scouring the county in search of a wife. But Thomas, it appeared, had already scoured the county, had found the wife that suited him, and therefore there was no more to be said. Mr Preston sighed, swallowed his disappointment, and welcomed his daughter-in-law kindly. After all, he thought, Thomas, who was already comfortably off, had less need to marry an heiress than William, who had been for some years a subaltern in a marching regiment. Then came disappointment the second. William wanted to see the world—didn't want to marry Violet—didn't think he wanted to marry at all, and cut all argument short by exchanging into a corps which was under orders for India. This was rather serious. At the time of William's departure

Violet was within a few months of completing her twenty-first year ; without being precisely a beauty, she had more than the average share of good looks, and if Mr Preston had not had a third string to his bow, he would have been inconsolable. His head-gardener and factotum was in the habit, when contemplating a certain field which produced nothing but the worst kind of hay, of saying solemnly : "Hashes to hashes and dust to dust ! If the 'osses won't eat it, the cows must." This consolatory distich reassured Mr Preston. "My dear, she will make an admirable wife for Bob," he said to Mrs Preston, who agreed with him—as indeed she always agreed with him.

And Bob, a young lieutenant in the navy, fulfilled expectation. Returning, bearded and bronzed, from a long spell of foreign service, he not only fell over head and ears in love with his cousin, but had the good fortune—or so, at least, his parents flattered themselves—to secure her affection in return. For six weeks the young people had been together from morning to night. Together they had ridden, driven and danced ; together they were accustomed to wander about the garden after dinner, while their seniors dozed placidly, and together there seemed every reason to hope that they would spend the remainder of their lives. Thus it came to pass that Mr Preston,

sipping his claret in the twilight, pronounced the world to be a pleasant place.

If he could have transported himself to a spot some two hundred yards away from the arm-chair in which he was reposing, and if he could have overheard the dialogue that was being carried on there, it is quite possible that he might have modified his opinion. For, leaning over the iron fence which separated the garden from the park, was a slim, dark-haired lady whose blue eyes were flashing wrathfully, while the countenance of her companion, a good-looking young fellow with a close-cut brown beard, wore an expression of gloomy displeasure. Any casual observer who had come upon them suddenly would have felt no doubt but that he was looking on at a lovers' quarrel. As such, however, it was not considered by the principals.

"I don't quite understand what you mean," the girl was saying with considerable dignity, "by speaking to me like this——"

"Oh," broke in the other, "I only mean what I say. Nothing more, nothing less."

"And what you say is that I am never to speak to any man without having first obtained your gracious permission."

"I don't remember saying that."

"It comes to the same thing. If you claim the

right to object in one case I suppose you would claim it in all. What I can't make out is why you should think that you have a right to object in any case."

"You don't put things fairly, Vi. I told you I was sorry to see you encouraging that man Lightfoot, and I gave you my reasons for being sorry."

"Such convincing reasons! You happen to dislike him personally, and his father got into some scrape or other some time before the flood! And I don't like to be accused of 'encouraging' people: I think it a very impertinent expression."

"If dancing four times running with the same partner isn't encouragement, I don't know what is," returned the young man doggedly.

A smile broke out upon Miss Ripley's lips. "I think I remember somebody else with whom I danced more than four times that same evening," she remarked quietly.

"That was a different thing altogether. You might dance fourteen times with me and it would mean nothing. Nobody knows that better than I do."

"Oh. Still, I don't see what right you have to reproach me for dancing any number of times with another partner."

"The right of your nearest male relative present

N

on the occasion. I don't consider myself entitled to any other."

Perhaps this was not the answer which the young lady had expected: at all events it did not seem to please her. She frowned and turned away with an impatient movement, saying, "Uncle William is quite capable of taking care of me, I think."

"I dare say he is; but he can't very well take care of you in his absence, and it was only because he was absent from the ball that I took the liberty of warning you against that fortune-hunting fellow."

"How do you know that he is a fortune-hunter? I don't believe he is anything of the sort. I wish, Bob, you would sometimes allow me to forget that I have a fortune to be hunted! I wish with all my heart that I had no fortune!"

"Yet 40,000*l.* are not to be despised," remarked the young man, with a grave smile.

"I don't despise the money, though I don't think I care about it much. What I do despise is the absurd importance that some people seem to attach to it. You, for instance."

"Forty thousand pounds at 4½ per cent. is 1800*l.* a year," remarked Bob imperturbably. "It is not a colossal income, but I don't mind admitting that I think it a comfortable one—and so, no doubt, does Mr Lightfoot."

"At any rate he has not told me so," retorted the girl. She added, rather defiantly, "He is very kind and pleasant, and he dances remarkably well, and when I know him better I dare say I shall find out that he has other good qualities. If he considers 1800/. a year a comfortable income, he is only like you and the rest of the world, it appears."

"Oh, yes," replied Bob calmly. "Perhaps, if there is any difference between us, it is that I might consider a certain price too high a one to pay even for 1800/. a year, whereas I don't think that he would. But of course I may be wronging him."

The words were somewhat ambiguous, but he really did not think that she could misunderstand them. According to his ideas—which may or may not have been absurd—a naval lieutenant, with nothing except his pay and the allowance made him by his father, would be parting with no less a treasure than his self-respect by proposing marriage to a young lady of independent fortune; and no one, surely, would be so insane as to say or think that the ownership of 1800/. a year would be dearly purchased if coupled with that of so supremely lovely and charming a creature as Miss Ripley. Yet such was the perverse construction which she was pleased to put upon his language.

"You are more frank than flattering," she remarked. "Perhaps I ought to be thankful that there are some people in the world who wouldn't mind incurring the penalty. I had no idea that you were so very fond of money."

"I?—fond of money? What do you mean?"

"Well, you seem to think yourself quite extraordinarily self-denying because there are certain conditions upon which you wouldn't accept it. As a general rule, that much is taken for granted. But perhaps we had better drop the subject; it isn't worth quarrelling over."

"No, Violet," answered the young man rather sadly; "I don't want to quarrel with you—especially as this will be our last evening together. I'm off to Portsmouth to-morrow."

If he thought that this announcement would call forth any expression of regret or surprise from his companion, he was disappointed. She only turned and began to move in the direction of the house, saying carelessly, "Oh, I didn't know you meant to go away so soon."

"I have to go through a course of gunnery instruction," Bob explained; and he might have added that he was not under orders to join for another week, and that his hasty exit had only been decided upon within the last ten minutes. Being of an unsuspecting temperament, he had

allowed himself to fall in love with his cousin without wondering why they should have been so much left alone. The almost simultaneous discovery of his parents' designs and the girl's own evident predilection for another suitor had convinced him that the sooner he withdrew the better it would be for his peace, and if he had adopted the unwise course of cautioning her against that suitor, it was only because he really thought ill of the man and believed himself to be above any ignoble motives of jealousy.

That same evening, after Mr Preston had read family prayers and had gone to see that all the doors and windows were securely fastened—a duty which he could never be persuaded to delegate to any one else—Bob briefly communicated his intentions to his mother, who threw up her hands in consternation and exclaimed, “I know what it is! Violet has refused you.”

“I assure you she has done nothing of the sort, mother,” replied the young man, with his nose rather in the air. “Violet has not refused me, because I have not proposed to her. No doubt she would refuse me if I gave her the chance; but I am not going to give her the chance.”

“Dear, dear!” sighed Mrs Preston; “this is most unfortunate. We all thought——”

“Yes, I know you did,” interrupted her son;

"and you were all mistaken. I'm very sorry; but I can't help it."

"Your father will be terribly vexed," murmured the old lady.

Bob said he couldn't help that either, and to avoid further discussion went to bed.

Mr Preston's vexation did not, however, prove to be so great as his wife had anticipated. His natural shrewdness and lifelong experience had gifted him with a tolerably clear insight into human character, and he thought he knew very well why his son was hurrying away without apparent cause, and why Miss Ripley so ostentatiously abstained from expressing any regret at his retreat. When one is young one has high-flown ideas. If one is a poor lieutenant in the navy, one shrinks from declaring one's love to an heiress; if, on the other hand, one is a modest and properly brought-up young woman, one cannot possibly bring oneself to speak the first word. The old gentleman was not ill-pleased that his son should display a delicacy which he felt to have been somewhat lacking in himself, and expressed his conviction to Mrs Preston that it would all come right in the end. "My dear," said he, "they are ridiculously in love with each other. Any fool could see that with half an eye."

Acquiescence in human folly and contrariety

must, nevertheless, have its limits, and Mr Preston conceived that these had been exceeded when his niece returned from her morning ride, a day or two after Bob's departure, bringing Mr Lightfoot with her, and when she invited that gentleman to remain to luncheon. The man, being in the house, could not very well be turned out of it, but he received a very cold welcome, and no sooner had he gone away than Miss Ripley was taken to task with a severity to which she was not accustomed.

"My dear girl," said her uncle gravely, "you know, without my telling you, that all your friends are our friends, and that we are only too happy to see them here. But chance acquaintances are, as a rule, to be avoided; and I am convinced that if you knew as much of this man Lightfoot as I do, you would never have dreamt of asking him to cross my threshold."

"What do you know of him, Uncle William?" asked Violet, who perhaps suspected the truth, that her uncle knew very little indeed about Mr Lightfoot.

"I cannot enter into such matters with young ladies. You must take my word for it that he is a—*an undesirable person.*"

"But everybody knows him," persisted the girl, for she had not been trained to habits

of unquestioning obedience. And then she ran off a list of the county magnates at whose houses she had met the undesirable one.

"I confess that you surprise me," answered Mr Preston; "but the difficulty remains the same. Persons of rank and position may, if their tastes incline them that way, know disreputable people without losing caste: we have not the same privilege. We are compelled to be circumspect; and for myself, I must say emphatically that I disapprove of Mr Lightfoot, and that I should have preferred to decline his acquaintance had I been allowed any choice in the matter."

After that, Violet could only apologise and promise that the offence should not be repeated. This she did with a very good grace; but when it was suggested to her that she also should refuse to have anything further to say to Mr Lightfoot, she pointed out, reasonably enough, that it would be impossible for her to ask a friend to luncheon one day and cut him dead the next without assigning some reason for such unusual behaviour. Adequate reasons not being forthcoming upon the spur of the moment, the incident ended there, and the acquaintance which Mr Preston had declined was pursued by his niece with that increased interest which is the common result of opposition.

Miss Ripley had a large circle of friends, and many opportunities of widening it which were not open to the elderly couple with whom she lived. She could easily, if she were so minded, meet Mr Lightfoot five or six times a week without departing much from her ordinary habits, and as a matter of fact this was what she now saw fit to do. She never made any secret of the manner in which her time was spent, and thus Mr Preston, though not seriously alarmed, began to grow a little uneasy.

"I don't like this intimacy that has sprung up between Violet and young Lightfoot," he said to his wife one evening. "I think it ought to be put a stop to before it goes too far."

Mrs Preston, who was fat, good-natured, and constitutionally averse to taking trouble, sighed, and asked whether it mattered much. "Violet would never think of marrying him," she declared confidently. "An ugly little snub-nosed man like that! What could she possibly see in him?"

"I do not consider him an ugly man myself," replied Mr Preston impartially; "though I will go so far as to say that he has a rascally countenance. However, I have no sort of fear of Violet's falling in love with him. I am as sure that she will not do that as I am that he will do his utmost to get possession of her and her money."

"Perhaps he may not be so—so unprincipled as

you think," suggested Mrs Preston, more with a view to getting to bed in peace than from any abstract love of justice.

"Pooh!" returned her lord and master; "like father like son. I suppose you know that his father was warned off Newmarket heath."

"You don't tell me so! But perhaps he may have trespassed unintentionally. I am sure I myself——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr Preston; "you don't understand. I am speaking of a penalty inflicted by the stewards of the Jockey Club."

"What for?" inquired Mrs Preston, stifling a yawn.

"Well, for—for dishonourable conduct in connection with racing. It would take too long to explain fully, and I see that you are not attending. This much I can tell you about Lightfoot senior, that he lived and died a disgraced man; and of course his son inherits a share of his disgrace. Rightly or wrongly, it always is so. Besides, any one can tell at a glance what sort of character this young fellow is. When I see a man wearing ridiculously tight trousers and a white scarf, like a groom's, with a big horseshoe pin in it, I know what to think of him. It is notorious that he has no money; yet he is without a profession, and I understand that he hunts three days a week during

the winter. Obviously, therefore, he must either be a knave or a fool, and for my part I don't think he is a fool."

II

The worthy solicitor's conclusion, being based upon false premisses, was only in part correct. Mr Lightfoot, though not a rich man, was by no means destitute, and perhaps it may have been in some measure owing to that circumstance that he had never done anything to earn the epithet of knave. That he was very far indeed from being a fool was the opinion of all who knew him, and of the only person who knew him intimately—namely, himself. Many a man is described as being no one's enemy but his own: of Mr Lightfoot it might be truly said that he was no one's friend but his own. The son of a sporting gentleman-farmer, whose career as an owner of racehorses had been brilliant but brief, James Lightfoot had learned very early in life to view men and things with a cynicism which was perhaps the more sincere for being seldom or never verbally expressed. He had passed through bad times and good times, and had quietly studied the causes which had led to each. He had seen his father—a jolly, good-tempered fellow with a

red face and a loud voice—smiled upon by the aristocracy of the turf, treated with the utmost respect by his neighbours and admired by the general public; and he had seen the same man ostracised, despised and insulted for having committed an offence which persons of higher rank had committed—or, at all events, had been said to have committed—with impunity. These and other observations of the ways of the world had led him to form an opinion of human nature at large which occasional study of his own was in every way calculated to confirm. When he was left an orphan, he dispassionately took stock of his position and possessions, and found the latter, upon the whole, more satisfactory than the former. He was the owner of a moderate fortune, he was fairly well educated, and the glass before which he shaved himself in the morning reflected a square, dark-complexioned countenance which could not be called unpleasing. In addition, he had a thorough knowledge and love of horses, and a profound contempt alike for the intellect and the morals of his fellow-men. To set against these advantages there was his lack of social standing. This he now determined to acquire, and eventually did acquire. The squires of the neighbourhood, less rigid than Mr Preston, did not mould their conduct upon the lines of the bitter old

Mosaic dispensation, and saw no reason why a modest, unassuming young fellow like Lightfoot, who rode straight to hounds and was exceedingly obliging and useful in matters connected with the purchase or sale of hunters, should be treated as an outcast because he had had the misfortune to have a scamp for a father. By degrees, therefore, they allowed him to become acquainted with their wives and daughters; and if, in order to achieve this end, he had to part with some valuable animals at a less price than they had cost him, he did not consider the money thus sacrificed as thrown away. By the wives and daughters he was tolerated rather than liked; which was a subject of regret to him, because his intention was to render his footing more sure by marrying one of the daughters. Women, as a rule, are at first attracted by a cold and reserved manner; but when they have tried to break it down in vain, they instinctively assume an attitude of antagonism; and so Lightfoot, upon whom a certain reserve was imposed by his blank indifference to everything under the sun except his own prospects, did not make much headway with the ladies. They asked him to dinner, however, and the men thought him a very decent sort of fellow.

To the patient all things come, and to Mr

Lightfoot came, in the fulness of time, a piece of good fortune in the shape of an introduction to Miss Ripley. From that day his plans, hitherto somewhat vague, took definite form. Miss Ripley was personally agreeable to him; her fortune, as a matter of course, was still more so; and what was most agreeable of all was that the acquisition of both seemed likely to cost but little trouble. As sharp as a needle in matters of material interest, he knew as little as he cared about affairs of the heart, and when he found that he had made a favourable impression upon this well-dowered maiden, imagined that all the rest would be plain sailing. For opposition on the part of the Preston family he was prepared; but Miss Ripley was of age, and opposition which can be supported only by moral force was, in his eyes, scarcely worth taking into account.

Had Lightfoot been able to overhear the description of his person and presumed character which was keeping Mrs Preston from her bed at eleven o'clock at night, he would probably have been more amused than offended; but if, on the other hand, Mr Preston could have read the thoughts which were passing through Lightfoot's mind at that same hour, he would most undoubtedly have been more offended than amused. The young man was sitting in the snuggerly which

was the only tolerably well-furnished room in the rambling old farmhouse that he had inherited from his father. With his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets and his legs stretched out before him, he was meditatively smoking a cigar. The *Field*, which he had been reading, had slipped from his knees to the ground, and the current of his reflections ran somewhat on this wise :—

“I wonder how the deuce that old lawyer managed to get such a good business. Not by brains, that's very certain. Of course he wants to keep the girl's money, and small blame to him!—so should I. Only I don't think I should be quite such a goose as to play my hand in the open way that he does. I don't think I should be rude to a man in my own house because I suspected my niece of having taken a fancy to him. It was bad form in the first place, and it was unnaturally stupid in the second. If she hadn't liked me before, she would have begun to like me then; and as for our young naval friend, I doubt whether he ever had much of a chance.” He rose and took a turn or two up and down the room; then resumed his seat and his soliloquy. “I suppose I shall have to get the old fool's consent, though. It isn't essential, but it would look better—a great deal better; and looks, after all, are of importance. I must think it over as soon

as I have got *her* consent. I wonder how soon I might venture to speak. Could I do it at the races to-morrow, for instance? It would be doubtful policy to put off too long; still I believe women don't like to be hurried—ladies, at least." He smiled as he recalled certain bygone conquests which had not required much manœuvring on his part; but the smile left his features abruptly and was succeeded by an anxious frown. "I do hope," he muttered, "that I'm not going to perpetrate the absurdity of falling in love with this girl! I certainly have a feeling about her that I never had about anyone before; but, hang it, that's not love, surely! It's—it's respect, or something of that sort—a very proper feeling to have towards one's wife. And yet . . . James Lightfoot, my good friend, you must mind what you're about; you're letting your animal instincts get the better of you, sir. Come; I'll test you. Would you marry Miss Ripley if she hadn't a hundred a year of her own? Not you!" He laughed a little and drew a breath of relief. "I see how it is. She's a handsome girl, and I've been playing a part till I've come almost to believe in it, that's all. If there is a spice of reality in it, why, so much the better; it won't last long enough to be any inconvenience."

Reassured by this comforting conviction, Mr

Lightfoot went upstairs to bed, and was soon enjoying the sound sleep to which a fine constitution and a well-balanced mind entitled him.

III

Neither Mr nor Mrs Preston was in the habit of attending the annual Westhampton race-meeting. In their young days racing had been held to be a pastime reserved for the aristocratic and the disreputable, and now that they were old they felt no inclination to diverge from the traditions of middle-class respectability. Miss Ripley, however, was free to do as her friends did, and on the morning to which this brief sketch of a part of her life has brought us, she might have been seen on the top of a drag near the winning-post, looking in the best of health and spirits, and delighting the eyes of the passers-by with her fresh beauty.

The eyes of Mr Lightfoot, who happened to be one of these, glistened when he caught sight of her; but he only bowed and walked on. He was a man who never neglected details, and he preferred being brought back to luncheon by the owner of the drag, with whom he was acquainted, to climbing up upon it without a direct invitation. He accomplished his purpose by-and-by without any

difficulty; for upon a racecourse his company was always sought with that extra cordiality which even the least avaricious of men cannot but show towards those whose advice may put them in the way of making a little money. He himself was quite aware of this circumstance, and was careful to pay for his luncheon with a few judicious hints distributed among his entertainers. If he indulged himself with an occasional touch of irony at their expense, he only did so because he knew that there was not the slightest fear of their detecting it. To Miss Ripley he showed no marked attention, and it was not until she casually mentioned that she had never yet seen a start that he perceived his opportunity, and sprang at it before anyone else could anticipate him.

"If you would allow me to pilot you through the crowd," he said, "we might easily see the horses get off for the next race, and be back again before the finish."

"Thank you, Mr Lightfoot," answered Violet; "I should like it of all things." And presently the pair were wending their way, side by side, through as noisy and crowded a solitude as the most diffident lover could have desired.

Diffidence was not exactly among Mr Lightfoot's defects, but he was far from feeling at his ease now. He had almost made up his mind before

starting that he would propose that day ; yet somehow the decisive moment seemed to have come upon him unexpectedly, and he was conscious of a recurrence of that singular sensation which he had attributed, the night before, to respect for the lady of his choice. Absorbed in his own thoughts, he scarcely heard what his companion was saying, and turned round with a start at last when he realised that a question was being addressed to him.

“I beg your pardon !—you were asking whether I went to all the great races. Yes ; I don’t miss many meetings, great or small. You see,” he added in a slightly apologetic tone, “I haven’t a large number of interests in life, and I can’t boast of much talent or knowledge, except as regards horseflesh. That I *do* know something about ; and a good race well ridden is a finer sight to look at than anyone who only sees a horse galloping and a man on his back can understand.”

“Yes ; no doubt. You are like the artists who go into ecstasies over old pictures which only strike ordinary mortals as being singularly unlike anything in nature. And then, I suppose,” pursued Miss Ripley tentatively—for she was curious to discover whether current reports as to Mr Lightfoot’s manner of living were well founded or not—“I

suppose you have the satisfaction of carrying away a nice little sum from each of these meetings."

"Well, no; I haven't that satisfaction. I never bet."

"Never bet!" repeated Violet, with raised eyebrows. "And yet you always seem to know what horse will win."

Lightfoot smiled. "Not always. Here in my own county I can form a pretty shrewd guess, of course, but I don't set up for a prophet elsewhere; and even here, as I told you, I don't turn my knowledge to account. The fact is——" He paused for a moment, looking down to the ground, then resumed rather hurriedly: "Perhaps you may have heard—that is, you *must* have heard—about my poor father."

Violet reddened and murmured something unintelligible; for indeed it was not easy to make any articulate response.

"He was more sinned against than sinning," the young man went on; "still it would be absurd to pretend that he was blameless. I know what his temptations were, and I know what mine might easily be; so, fond as I am of racing, I have never owned a racer, and as for betting, I gave that up years ago, when I found what it might lead me to."

The statement was not quite so straightforward

as it appeared to be. Mr Lightfoot, it was true, had so far taken to heart the lesson taught by his father's misfortunes that he had determined never even to run a plater; but his reason for so determining was most likely identical with his reason for eschewing betting; and that was a somewhat remarkable one. He had convinced himself that backing horses could not be made to pay. As he is probably the only experienced backer who has ever arrived at this conclusion—or, at all events, the only one who has had the courage of his convictions—the circumstance seems to deserve mention. Upon the present occasion his words had precisely the effect which he had intended them to have. Miss Ripley was not only very sorry for him, but admired his courage and candour.

“I dare say you are quite right,” she said gently, after a short pause; “it is always better to be upon the safe side. Only I don’t think you need have been much afraid of temptation.”

“Why do you say that?” asked the young man eagerly.

“Because,” she answered, raising her eyes frankly to his, “I am sure you are honest.”

The compliment was not, perhaps, expressed exactly in the form which a little more reflection would have suggested; for, after all, it is an

awkward thing to congratulate a man upon differing from his father with regard to that especial virtue, but such as it was it gave intense satisfaction to Lightfoot, whose pale cheek flushed with pleasure.

"I won't contradict you," he said. "It has been the one aim and object of my life to be perfectly straight in all my dealings. I have tried never to give any man an excuse for turning round upon me and saying, 'I didn't know what you were driving at.' I should like, if it were possible, always to let everyone with whom I have to do know just what I am driving at."

"Why should that not be possible?" Miss Ripley asked.

Lightfoot did not answer for a moment, but glanced at her in a peculiar manner. "Well, it isn't always possible," he said at last, with a sigh. "Sometimes one hasn't the necessary courage."

In this instance, nevertheless, he had certainly shown the courage which he disclaimed. Miss Ripley perfectly understood his meaning, and he saw that she understood it. Had he been more experienced in the ways of women, he might have thought her composure a disquieting omen; but as a matter of fact, he interpreted it in quite the opposite sense, and concluded with exultation that the victory was won.

"Miss Ripley," he began gravely, but got no further; for at that moment there arose a general shout of "They're off!" Then came a thundering sound upon the turf, and half-a-dozen brightly coloured jackets flashed past and were gone.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lightfoot penitently, "I forgot all about the start."

"So did I," answered Violet; "but it doesn't matter. "I am one of those ignorant persons whom you spoke of, who see nothing in a race except a number of horses galloping, and I shouldn't have known whether it was a good start or a bad one. Shall we go back now?"

Lightfoot assented silently. The interruption had disturbed his ideas, and he had to rehearse the speech that he had intended making over again. However, Fate or Fortune had decreed that that speech was to remain unuttered. On a sudden a shrill voice from the crowd piped out, "Hi! mum, yer gown's afire!"—and an instant afterwards something had taken place which called for action, not words. A blazing fuzee, flung away by some careless smoker, might have robbed the world of a charming woman and Mr Lightfoot of a fair prospect of 40,000/., had that gentleman not happened to be a man who kept his wits about him in times of emergency. Violet scarcely realised her danger till the whole thing was over.

Without a moment's warning she found herself thrown down upon the grass; she saw but scarcely felt the flames which for one second enveloped her, and which Lightfoot, who had torn off his coat and wrapped it tightly round the girl's body, had some little difficulty in extinguishing; but in her bewilderment she had no time to be frightened, and when she fully recovered her senses all peril was past. Lightfoot was standing over her, pale, and panting a little; his shirt-sleeve was burnt up to the shoulder. A policeman had run up and was keeping back the crowd. Violet, looking down, discovered that nothing remained of her dress except a blackened rag; her right hand was somewhat red and blistered, but otherwise she was quite unhurt, and said so, laughing rather hysterically in answer to the young man's anxious inquiries.

"We had better get out of this as soon as possible," Lightfoot said. The policeman was helping him on with his coat, and he winced slightly as he passed his arm into the sleeve. "Get back, will you!" he exclaimed savagely, turning round upon the crowd, which was following close upon the heels of the charred couple. "What the devil do you expect to get by hustling us? Do you think we are going to burst into flames again for your amusement? I only wish I

knew which of you cads threw down that lighted match?"

"What would you do to him?" asked Violet, glancing at the young man's angry face. She had never seen Mr Lightfoot in a passion before, and the truth is that wrath was very becoming to him—as indeed it is to all pale-complexioned men.

"I would break his neck," answered Lightfoot, looking as if he fully meant what he said. "Thank heaven it is no worse! You have had a narrow shave, Miss Ripley. Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Quite sure. And you? Oh, but you are! — you are dreadfully hurt!" she exclaimed suddenly, catching sight of her companion's hand, which in truth presented a sufficiently sickening spectacle.

He put it behind his back hastily. "It is nothing," he said; "only a scorch. These things always look worse than they really are."

And before Violet could say more she was surrounded by excited friends, enveloped in shawls, helped into the carriage of a good-natured lady, and driven off homewards. Not until she was a mile away from the racecourse did she remember that she had not even spoken a word of thanks to the man who had saved her life.

IV

As for Mr Lightfoot, it is probable that if he had encountered the heedless author of the accident he would have abstained, after all, from breaking the neck of one who had rendered him a signal service. He felt quite sure of success now, and the week which he spent in bed, by the doctor's orders, was not an unpleasant week, in spite of the sufferings which a badly burnt arm and hand necessarily entailed. It brought him, among other agreeable things, a host of inquiries and congratulations, a vast supply of flowers, grapes and ice from all quarters, and a very prettily expressed note from Miss Ripley, in which all previous omissions were amply atoned for. He had never in his life trusted to luck, nor believed much in any such thing; but he could not help thinking that he was in luck's way now, and he would have been still more convinced of this if he had understood his case better and had known the turn that affairs were taking at Mayfield.

The peace of that quiet household had been a good deal disturbed by Miss Ripley's accident. Mr Preston, feeling that decency forbade him any longer to refuse the acquaintance of the obnoxious Lightfoot, had grumbled and growled in a manner

not usual with him, and had made things very uncomfortable for his wife, who, for her part, had been thrown into such agitation by the mere thought of her niece's adventure as to lose her appetite for two whole days. "My dear," she repeated over and over again to Violet, "I don't know *what* Bob will say when he hears of this!"

And perhaps it was rather a pity that the point should have been so much dwelt upon; because, when a letter bearing the Portsmouth post-mark arrived a few days later, Miss Ripley naturally requested to be informed what Bob *had* said—a request which, as it happened, there was a difficulty about acceding to. Mrs Preston tried to temporise and equivocate. She said, "Oh, he was dreadfully distressed—he thought we ought all to be very thankful that it was no worse—I don't recollect his exact words," and so forth; but it wouldn't do. She had long ago established an unfortunate standing order to the effect that all her letters might be read by her niece upon the condition that the latter should undertake to answer them, and she found herself unable to revoke this contract at pleasure. Indeed, it was under her very nose, and in spite of all her expostulations, that Miss Ripley seized Bob's letter and read the following odious sentences:—

"Please offer my congratulations to Violet on

her escape. Mr Lightfoot is also to be congratulated, notwithstanding his singed wing; and I take it that before long I shall be called upon to congratulate them both again — though not on an escape. As for you, my dear mother, I can but condole with you and with my father. It is sad to think that, in spite of all our efforts, 40,000*l.* are likely to pass away from the family for ever; but we must console ourselves with the thought that we have done our best to keep them."

It was all very well for Mrs Preston to begin sobbing because Violet, after reading this, declared in so many words that her cousin was no gentleman; but tears, though they may serve to bring about apologies and embraces, cannot blot out a written insult, and when Miss Ripley set forth to take a long walk and recover herself, her anger against the brutal Bob was not one whit diminished.

Perhaps it was chance that led her to turn her steps in the direction of Mr Lightfoot's house: it certainly was nothing else that brought him out to the gate, with his arm in a sling and his pale face paler than usual. But when once these two had met, chance had nothing further to say to the matter, and the outcome of their interview was inevitable. It did not last long, and the language employed on both sides was calm

and sober; but it ended in a manner highly satisfactory to one, at least, of the parties concerned, while as for the other, the frequency with which she assured herself, during the course of her walk home, that she had done the right thing in engaging herself to Mr Lightfoot may be taken as evidence that she also was satisfied. It was true that she did not love him; but that was only because it was not in her nature to fall in love with anybody. Besides, she had been careful to inform him of this possible drawback to their happiness, and he had not seemed to think much of it. He had answered at once that there was love enough in his heart for two; which, to be sure, when you came to analyse it, was a rather nonsensical speech. Still it had been well meant, and Mr Lightfoot was a kind, noble and disinterested man, who would do his best to make the life which he had saved happy, and to whom she, on her side, would certainly endeavour to be a good wife. And having arrived at this climax, Miss Ripley, who happened to be in an unfrequented wood at the time, sat down on the ground and cried for five minutes as if her heart would break. After that, she dried her eyes and marched cheerfully homewards to break the news.

This, of course, was a task demanding some

little courage, and Violet knew that nothing but the most uncompromising opposition was to be looked for from her uncle. But the tone which Mr Preston took up was not quite what she had anticipated, nor did she find it by any means so easy to combat as reproaches and denunciations would have been.

"My dear girl," the old gentleman said, after blowing his nose loudly several times and looking quite heart-broken, "you are now your own mistress, and I am deprived of all control over your actions. This may or may not be an unfortunate fact—you and I are hardly likely to agree as to that—but a fact it is. If, then, you see fit to make a match of which I must strongly disapprove, I can neither forbid your doing so nor take any steps to protect you from the consequences of your choice, except in seeing that your money is settled upon yourself. Yet, in consideration of my age and of the many years during which I have been your guardian, you may perhaps be disposed to allow some little weight to my wishes and judgment."

"Uncle William," said the girl, "you know very well that I should never think of marrying anybody without your full consent."

"In that case, my dear, there is not the slightest chance of your marrying Mr Lightfoot."

"Oh, but I think you will give your consent. You may not like him personally; but you would not be so unjust as to prevent our marriage because your taste does not happen to agree with mine, and you must admit that there is not a word to be said against Mr Lightfoot's character."

"I admit nothing, my dear," replied Mr Preston, with a wave of his hand and a smile, "I admit nothing; and as for what you call personal dislike, I believe I am not so silly as to dislike any man without a reason. But are you convinced that you yourself like this man? 'Like' is not a strong enough word: are you convinced that you *love* him?"

"Do you think it possible that I should have accepted him if I had not cared for him?"

"Oh, dear me, yes!—quite possible. Probable, indeed, taking all the circumstances into account. Now I am going to touch upon a delicate subject," continued Mr Preston, "and I may perhaps offend your pride, but where the happiness of two lives is at stake one should not be over-squeamish. You know, my dear Violet, that although I do not talk about all that I see, I am not blind; and the attachment which existed not so very long ago between you and my son Robert was sufficiently obvious——"

"There never was anything of the sort!" inter-

rupted Violet, with her cheeks aflame. "You are altogether mistaken."

Mr Preston laughed gently and shook his head. "Pique, my dear, pique—just what I expected. Now lovers' quarrels are all very fine, but we mustn't go beyond the limits of reconciliation. Believe me, Robert is——"

"I know perfectly well what Robert is," broke in Violet impatiently; "and I know what he never will be, too. He was polite enough to tell me that he would like my money very much, but that marrying me would be paying too long a price for it; and since then he has written a most insulting letter about me without any provocation. I cannot imagine any two people detesting one another more cordially than Robert and I."

"That is absurd, my dear," answered Mr Preston placidly. "No man—Bob least of all—would make such a speech as you mention, but I can easily believe that the fact of your being well off might lead him to conceal his feelings. From Mr Lightfoot, on the other hand, I should not expect so much scrupulousness."

"Mr Lightfoot," returned Violet, "has never given you any excuse for saying that."

"Well, I shouldn't expect it of him, that's all. I shouldn't expect it of the generality of mankind. Are you really under the impression

that Mr Lightfoot would marry you if you hadn't a penny?"

"I am quite sure that he would," replied Violet firmly; "and so would you be if you knew him better. - Uncle William, if I can convince you that it is myself and not my money that he cares for, will you consent to—to what he wishes?"

Mr Preston rubbed his hands and said cheerfully, "Now that is what I call sensible; that is bringing matters to a reasonable issue. Yes, my dear; you have only to convince me that this young man is wholly disinterested, and I will give you away to him on your wedding-day—I won't say with pleasure, but at least with proper resignation. You may tell him so from me, if you like."

The cautious solicitor thought he had never in his life taken upon him a safer engagement, and indeed Violet, who now left the room, was aware that the process by which conviction could be brought home to her uncle must needs be somewhat difficult of discovery. She had, however, already in her mind a half-formed project which, if carried into effect, could not fail to silence the veriest sceptic.

The next day Mr Lightfoot drove up to the door in a dog-cart, prepared to make formal announcement of his engagement to Violet, and to

receive her ex-guardian's blessing or submit to his curses with an equal mind. But Mr Preston was in his office at Westhampton, and it was Miss Ripley who received her suitor when he was admitted into the drawingroom. The first moment of meeting was one of some slight embarrassment to them both. Lightfoot was not sure how far he would be expected to assume the lover's part, and Violet was in mortal terror lest he should assume it only too unequivocally. She therefore contrived, with more agility than grace, to keep a barrier of furniture between her and her visitor until he was safely seated; after which she came out from her intrenchments and took a chair opposite to him.

"Your uncle is not at home, I hear," he remarked presently.

"No; and I am glad he is not, because I wanted to see you before you spoke to him. I am sorry to say that he objects decidedly to our engagement."

"Ah, I expected that," observed Lightfoot.

"But why?" asked Violet, with a touch of impatience. "Why should you have expected him to object?"

"Why, naturally, because he doesn't want to lose the interest of a fortune," thought Lightfoot; but he only looked down and said, "Have you

forgotten what I told you the other day about my father?"

"Oh, but indeed it was not that," cried Violet. "I am sure he never—at least, that was not at all what he was thinking of. I had better say it out at once, though it is rather disagreeable: he accused you of being mercenary."

"Yes? Well, you see, Miss Ripley, a good many people *are* mercenary."

"So it seems; but I hope you are not one of them."

"I hope not; only a man who marries an heiress must be prepared for such accusations, and I'm afraid we can't alter the fact that you are an heiress. I don't think we ought to let your uncle's opposition trouble us too much. No doubt it would be far pleasanter to have his cordial approval of our marriage; but if we can't have it—well, we must do without it."

Violet drew back. "I could not do that," she said. "I couldn't marry you, or any one, without my uncle's consent. He has always been like a father to me, and however much I might think him in the wrong, I should feel it impossible to defy him. But I think I can bring him round."

Lightfoot swallowed down his irritation. "You are quite right, Miss Ripley," he replied quietly, "and I will do my best to be patient if you don't

succeed at first. The unfortunate thing is that your uncle is one of those practical men who don't change their opinions without clear evidence to go upon, and how we are to bring evidence to show that I am not mercenary I confess I don't quite see."

"Yet such a thing might be done," observed Violet. "Mr Lightfoot, would you mind if I had no money—if I gave all my money away?"

Lightfoot's heart stood still; but he had great self-command, and his face did not change. To whom could she give her money away? Not to Mr Preston, who would never dare to risk his reputation by accepting such a gift. Not to a charity; for her uncle might safely be trusted to avert so dire a catastrophe as that. On the other hand, the threat, if made in good faith, as it doubtless would be, might prove effectual in overcoming the old man's obstinacy. These reflections, which passed through his brain like lightning, enabled him to answer with perfect composure, "Surely you need hardly have asked that question. Are you, too, beginning to suspect me of being a fortune-hunter?"

Violet's reply was intercepted by the entrance of Mrs Preston, who had not been informed of Mr Lightfoot's presence, and who was thrown into such an agony of embarrassment when she recog-

nised him that he felt bound in common humanity to release her from her sufferings and take himself off with all despatch. He would have been glad to have heard something rather more explicit from Miss Ripley with regard to her intentions, but upon the whole he was not ill satisfied, feeling that there could be no real danger of her parting with her fortune. "What a fool that girl is!" he muttered to himself as he drove out of the gates. "I was very nearly in love with her an hour ago, but I'll be hanged if I am now!"

Violet, at the same moment, was replying to certain tearful ejaculations of her aunt's. "What do I see in him? I see that he is trustworthy and unselfish, and that he cares for me for my own sake. Isn't that enough? I never noticed his nose. I dare say it is a snub, as you say so; but really I shouldn't care if it were as crooked as a ram's horn. I am not particular about noses."

All that evening Mr Preston was bland and amiable. He made no allusion to his niece's matrimonial prospects, and when she begged for a few minutes' private conversation on business, answered that if to-morrow morning would do as well he should prefer to wait. "Never hurry your lawyer, my dear," said he with a comfortable sigh. "There is always plenty of time—plenty of time."

Violet smiled. If her uncle had guessed what the nature of her business was, he would have been a little less apathetic, she thought. And when the next morning came, she certainly had the satisfaction of startling him out of his professional composure.

"If you please, Uncle William," said she demurely, "I want you to draw out a deed of gift—that is the proper expression, is it not?—making over the whole of my money to my well-beloved cousin, Robert Preston."

Mr Preston bounded on his chair, and his double eye-glass dropped. "You mean this for a joke, I suppose," he said presently.

"Oh, no. Some people value money above all things, you know, and others don't care so much about it. It is a pity not to gratify everybody's tastes when one has the power. At any rate, I suppose you will admit now that Mr Lightfoot is not a fortune-hunter."

"May I ask whether Mr Lightfoot has been informed of your scheme?"

"I had not time to tell him all about it, but I believe he understood that I meant to part with my money."

"Ah!" said Mr Preston, stretching out his legs and leaning back in his chair with a smile. "Well, Violet, I can only say that if, after you

have impoverished yourself, he is still willing to marry you, I shall be proud to welcome him into the family; but I am afraid I must decline to give you the assistance which you ask for. You see, people would be sure to say unpleasant things about it, and much as I value money, I value my character even more highly. Still, if you are quite determined, I daresay there are lawyers in Westhampton who would do the business for you. Robinson, for instance—a very respectable man in his small way.”

“Thank you,” said Violet. “Then I will lose no time in applying to him.” With that, she rose to leave the room, but rather marred the dignity of her exit by pausing upon the threshold to say, “I suppose we may take it for granted that Robert will accept this money?”

“That,” replied Mr Preston, “is a point upon which I don’t feel called upon to offer an opinion.”

“I think he will accept,” said Violet defiantly.

“Well,” answered her uncle, with perfect good humour, “perhaps he will. Perhaps he will.”

So Miss Ripley, with an uncomfortable impression that the interview had somehow or other been lacking in dramatic effect, drove off to Westhampton, where, under her orders, the astonished Robinson duly drew up a rough copy

of the deed which was to deprive his client of all means of subsistence.

As for Mr Preston, he, too, betook himself to the town shortly afterwards, and, having written and despatched a letter to Portsmouth, sat down in the arm-chair at his office, rubbing his hands and chuckling softly. "I call this great fun," he said aloud; and when his eldest son, a grave personage, inquired to what he alluded, he replied, "Oh, to nothing worth repeating. You wouldn't see the joke, Thomas."

Two days elapsed, upon both of which Mr Lightfoot called at Mayfield, with the discouraging result of finding nobody at home; and on the third Violet, who had purposely avoided meeting her suitor until she should have tidings of importance to communicate to him, received the following letter:—

"HIGH STREET, WESTHAMPTON,

"August 3, 188-.

"MADAM,—We beg to inform you that we have this day heard from Lieutenant Robert Preston, H.M.S. *Excellent*, Portsmouth, who expresses his readiness to accept the personal property which you desired to be conveyed to him; and which, as we understood from you, amounts in round numbers to forty thousand

pounds (40,000/). Awaiting your further instructions, we have the honour to be, Madam,

“Your obedient servants,

“ROBINSON AND THOMPSON.”

There was a curt and business-like tone about this missive which was not altogether satisfactory to its recipient. She had, however, the comfort of tossing it across the table to her uncle and remarking, “I told you so!”

Mr Preston deliberately stuck his glasses on his nose and read the letter through; after which he remarked “Hah!” Then he restored it to its envelope and handed it back to his niece with a subdued “Hum!”—which two ejaculations apparently exhausted all that he had to say upon the subject.

“You see!” cried Violet triumphantly.

“I see;—yes. And now perhaps I had better see Mr Lightfoot.”

“The sooner the better. I will send a note at once asking him to come over. But I think I ought just to tell him what I have done before he meets you, Uncle William.”

Mr Preston said that that would no doubt be the best plan; and so, when Mr Lightfoot put in an appearance—as he did within the hour—he was shown into the drawingroom, where Miss

Ripley, with sparkling eyes and a slightly flushed face, was waiting for him.

She presented so much the appearance of being in a towering passion that Lightfoot was seriously alarmed, and began to wonder which of the peccadilloes of his past life could have been reported to her.

"What is it, Miss Ripley?" he inquired anxiously. "I trust I have not been so unlucky as to offend you?"

"You? Oh dear, no! I only wished to tell you something. You know I asked you, the other day, whether you would mind if I gave all my money away, and you said it was needless even to ask such a question. Well; now I have done it. I have given my money away, and my uncle can't possibly accuse you of being mercenary any longer. You will find him in his study, and——"

"You have given your money away!" exclaimed Lightfoot, aghast. "And to whom, pray?"

"To my cousin Robert—if it signifies."

"And do you mean to say that he has taken it?"

Violet made a sign of assent.

"Then he must be the most contemptible fellow that ever walked the earth!"

"He is. At least, I don't know—— What

does it matter whether he is or not? He has got what he wants, and we have got rid of what we don't want, and there's an end of it!"

"An end of it!—I should think there *was* an end of it!" was Lightfoot's unspoken comment. "Why, the girl's a raving maniac!" Then he said aloud: "I very much regret, Miss Ripley, that you should have been so precipitate. When you spoke of parting with your fortune, I presumed, of course, that you were merely employing a figure of speech. I can assure you that my affection for you is not at all diminished by the step that you have taken, although I may have my own opinion about your wisdom and about the honesty of your relations. But as for marrying upon nothing but my small income, I am sorry to say that such a thing is altogether out of the question."

"Do you mean me to understand, then, that all is over between us?" inquired Violet, maintaining her composure very creditably.

"I fear that it must be so. I need not say how painful this is to me."

"You need not; I can fully enter into your feelings of disappointment. I also am disappointed—in you. Probably, though, you are no worse than your neighbours, and I do not forget that you saved my life. I am only sorry that

it has turned out less valuable than you supposed at the time. Goodbye, Mr Lightfoot."

"Goodbye, Miss Ripley. I hope you will not live to repent of your mistaken generosity."

When the door had closed behind the discomfited Lightfoot, Violet betook herself to her uncle's study.

"Well; has he gone?" asked Mr Preston briskly.

"He has gone. Uncle William, I find that I have been mistaken in Mr Lightfoot."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I don't wish to speak in any spirit of boastfulness, but I am bound to say that *I* never made any mistake about him from the first. The truth is, my dear girl, that although you might not suppose it, I really do know a little more about men and things than you do. I know, for instance, that when a young lady talks about marrying A and handing over all her possessions to B, she does not in her heart of hearts believe that B stands for Barabbas or A for Angel. B does not stand for Barabbas, my dear, but for Bob, and Robert is not a robber. If, by any chance, you should think that you owe him an apology, you will soon have an opportunity of offering it; for I have made so bold as to telegraph for him in anticipation of what has occurred, and it would not surprise me if he were to arrive by the evening express."

Having thus delivered himself, Mr Preston seized his hat and escaped from the house before any reply could be made; and it may be presumed that Violet spent the remainder of the day in a wholesome exercise of self-examination, for when Bob was sent out into the garden that evening to look for his cousin he found her very meek and subdued.

"My father tells me that you are anxious to beg my pardon," he remarked, after they had shaken hands.

"I don't know why he should think so; but I am sure I am willing to beg your pardon, Bob, if you consider yourself aggrieved. As everybody seems to be against me, I suppose I had better confess myself in the wrong at once, for the sake of peace; though I do think that, if there is to be any begging of pardons, you might begin by begging mine for the horrid letter that you wrote about me."

"I don't see that at all," returned Bob. "I wrote that I expected to hear of your engagement to Lightfoot very soon, and I did hear of it sooner even than I had anticipated. Was that any reason for throwing forty thousand pounds and a studied insult at my head? How you can ever have believed that I was serious in accepting such a gift passes my comprehension!"

"You did accept it, though."

"Only in obedience to my father's instructions. He said there was no other way of opening your eyes and saving you from a life of misery. So I did as I was told; though I confess that I didn't half like it. A pretty fool I should have looked if Lightfoot had been sharp enough to see the trap!"

"Poor Mr Lightfoot! And I should have been burnt to death but for his presence of mind. I don't think it was very nice of you to write about him in that sneering way. Why did you do it, Bob?"

"Because I was jealous of him, I suppose. Oh, Violet, you must have known the truth!—you must have known that I loved you from the very first day that we met. I should have told you so long ago, if it hadn't been for that cursed money! And even now——"

"Don't call your money names," she interrupted quietly; "you won't find it a curse when you get used to it."

"It is not my money," cried Bob. "What do you mean?"

"Only that it *is* your money, or will be very shortly. You took it, and now I am determined that you shall keep it."

"I pass for being a rather determined sort of

person too," remarked Bob, "and I can assure you that I mean you to keep your money for yourself."

"Even against my own wishes?"

"Without any regard for your wishes whatsoever."

"Well, then," said Violet with a sigh, "since we are both so obstinate, I suppose there is only one way out of the difficulty. You will have to take the money and me with it, Bob."

PRINCE CORESCO'S DUEL

IT was on a beautiful afternoon in the month of May that Prince Coreesco left his Roumanian home and set out for Paris. How glad he was to go! how delightful it was to him to contemplate the very name of his destination, printed upon his railway ticket! We, on this side of the Channel, shall never quite understand what Paris means to the fashionable and would-be fashionable young men of Continental Europe. To them it is still—even in these days of republican government and diminished glory—the capital of the world, the centre of civilisation, the city in comparison with which all other cities are but provincial towns. They take their tone from it; they assimilate, to the best of their ability, the little tricks of speech and manner in vogue amongst those who claim to lead its society; their great ambition is to pass themselves off as being in reality what they more or less skilfully counterfeit, and their ambition is doomed to perpetual disappointment. For if the model in question does not, to impartial eyes, appear a particularly

noble or inspiring one, it has at least the peculiarity of being quite inimitable; and one may safely say that no foreigner, whether Russ, Pole, Spaniard or uncertain cosmopolitan Hebrew, ever has been, or ever will be, mistaken for a true Parisian.

Prince Coreesco, however, though not the rose, had lived very near the rose. He was well known in Parisian clubs and at Longchamps and Vincennes and other places where people lose money; he lost money (of which he had plenty) with a very good grace; and as, in truth, he was a well-meaning, kind-hearted and simple-minded creature, he was liked as much as he was laughed at—which is saying a good deal. Not that he ever suspected his friends and acquaintances of laughing at him; it would have been a cruel blow to him if he had discovered that he was in any way a subject for mirth. To be accused of idleness or extravagance, he could endure; his mother sometimes did accuse him of these sins. But if there was one thing that he was more certain of than another, it was that no one had the right to call him ridiculous. He had taken such pains to avoid the possibility of incurring that reproach. All that mortal man could do towards denationalising himself he had done; not for worlds would he have shown himself at any European court in the magnificent costume of

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his ancestors, which would have suited his handsome face and slim figure so admirably. A story used to be told of one of his compatriots, who, being present at a great function at Berlin, clad in the semi-military garb in question, was noticed by a high Prussian personage, who eagerly inquired his rank. "*C'est un Moldo-Valaque, monseigneur,*" was the answer of the well-informed person applied to. "*Si jeune, et déjà Moldo-Valaque !*" cried the high personage graciously, for, of course, he did not wish to appear ignorant of any foreign grades, however unfamiliar in sound. Some side-wind wafted this anecdote to Paris and, most untruthfully, made our friend Prince Coresco the hero of it. "*Si jeune, et déjà Moldo-Valaque !*" the young men at the club used to cry, pointing to his decorations, when he strolled in late at night, after attending some official reception. He had to give up wearing his decorations in consequence ; he did not like to be reminded of those remote Danubian wilds where his estates lay. But he never showed any annoyance ; his countenance at all times and under all circumstances was perfectly impassive. It is not correct to exhibit emotion, and Coresco was *très-correct*. Those young men occasionally called him *Correcto* ; and he was not displeased with the nickname.

Now, as he took his place in the Orient-express,

and seated himself in the corner of the little compartment reserved for him, he was a model of correctness from the tips of his waxed moustache down to those of his little shiny-leather boots. His dark-coloured kid gloves were quite new; between his fingers he held a cigarette made of the choicest tobacco that money could procure; he crossed one shapely leg over the other and looked gravely contented. He conceived, indeed, that he had good reason to be so. He had at last reached the end of the long dreary winter; he had escaped from the dissipations of Bucharest, which were distasteful to him, as one accustomed to better things; above all, he had escaped from the matrimonial engagement into which his mother had tried so hard to inveigle him; and now he was going to live once more. It was a little late in the year, to be sure; but Paris is never really empty until after the Grand Prix; he would find plenty of his old associates at the club; the old whirling of pleasure, which he was too young to have wearied of, would be all ready and waiting for him.

Thus, with his head full of agreeable anticipations, he gazed languidly out of the window at the vast, monotonous plains, at the bars of bright yellow drawn across them, here and there, by the mustard fields, at the oxen dragging their primitive carts

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along the unmetalled roads, at the shaggy, bearded peasants who turned to stare at the train as it rushed past. "*Adieu, canaille !*" he murmured between his teeth.

As the shades of night began to fall, Prince Coresco grew hungry and, getting up, passed into the adjoining restaurant-car, where many of his fellow-passengers were already seated at dinner. To ordinary travellers, accustomed to snatch hasty meals when and where they can get them, it appears something like the height of luxury to be permitted to sit down to a very fairly cooked dinner without leaving their train; but Coresco was fastidious, and the fare set before him did not earn his approval. He made a grimace, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and partook of it with resignation. He did not much like the company in which he found himself either. It was composed of the usual horde of tourists returning homewards from the East—vociferous Germans, self-asserting Americans, and those astonishing English old maids who are to be met with in such profusion in every country under the sun, except their own. They were all rather dirty, shabby and travel-stained. Coresco turned up his nose at them; he could not admit that people have any business to be dirty because they are on a journey. He himself was as spick-and-span as a new pin, and meant to re-

main so up to the moment of his arrival at the Paris terminus.

However, he ended by acknowledging that there were two individuals in this unattractive throng who might claim exemption from his vote of censure. Strictly speaking, there was only one; but he generously threw in the mother for the sake of the daughter. And indeed the younger of the two ladies who occupied the table facing his own was so charming in appearance that no one, looking at her, could have thought it worth while to waste time in criticising the elder. Her golden-brown hair, her soft hazel eyes and long eyelashes would have sufficed in themselves to insure for her the admiration of any appreciative stranger; but, in addition to these gifts, she had a something—a sort of frank friendliness of air, a mixture of innocence and hardihood, due evidently to childish ignorance of all evil, which is always especially fascinating to hardened men of the world, such as Coresco believed himself to be. He was not, as a rule, particularly fond of English people, whom he considered an ill-mannered race, but he was very fond of pretty faces, and the more he studied this one the more he became interested in it. He went so far as to say to himself that it was the prettiest face he had ever seen in his life.

After a time he saw it under a suddenly

changed aspect. An animated colloquy had begun between the two ladies; the elder was making gestures of despair; she dived into her pockets; she turned out the contents of her travelling-bag; she fled from the dining-car and presently returned, red in the face and gasping: it was as plain as could be that she had mislaid her railway tickets.

"They are gone!—gone!" Coresco heard her exclaim tragically. "The last time I saw them was on the boat, crossing the Danube, when those tiresome people came bothering for them, and I must have laid them down on the seat beside me. Very likely they were blown overboard. And the worst of it is that I have no money—only about two pounds! I wrote to the bankers to send us circular notes to Vienna. Oh, Daisy, what *shall* we do?"

Miss Daisy's face grew long, her eyebrows were raised distressfully; the corners of her mouth came down; it really looked very much as if she might be going to cry. This was more than the gallant Roumanian could bear. It is not correct to address total strangers; he had never been guilty of such a solecism before; yet there are occasions on which conventionality must yield to chivalry. He rose in his deliberate way, approached the ladies, made a low bow, bringing his heels together with a click, and said:—

"Pardon me, you are in a difficulty about your tickets, I think. Can I be of any service to you? I am well known on this line."

The girl who had been addressed as Daisy blushed and threw a grateful glance at the handsome, dark-complexioned young man who stood deferentially before her, hat in hand; the old lady broke out into voluble thanks.

"Oh, how very kind of you! If you would be so good as to explain to these people that we really are not swindlers! They will believe you, no doubt; I daresay they wouldn't believe us. We took our tickets from Constantinople, as they can easily find out by telegraphing. Anyhow, I will gladly pay the price over again as soon as we reach Vienna, but at this moment, most unfortunately, I have not enough money in my purse."

"Be at ease, madam," replied Coresco; "the affair shall be arranged at once."

He spoke quite good English, with only a slight foreign accent, for he had had an English nurse in his childhood; he was very good-looking and distinguished in appearance and manners. The old lady beamed upon him and nodded to him as he left the car. In a few minutes he returned, bringing with him two fresh tickets. "Search will be made for the others, madam, and if they are found your money will be given back to you," he said.

"Oh, but—but——" stammered the old lady, reddening, "I am afraid—have you *paid* for these tickets?"

Coresco smiled, showing his white teeth. He produced his card, scribbled beneath his name the address of his Paris club, and said, "You are perhaps travelling also to Paris? When you shall arrive, I will send, with your permission, to claim my little debt."

"Yes, we are going to Paris," answered the old lady, "but we shall not be there before the end of the week; we are stopping a day or two at Vienna. I don't think we ought—really, I am quite ashamed——"

However, she could hardly refuse to accept the helping hand held out to her in such dire extremity; possibly, too, she rather liked the notion of being beholden to a real live prince. It is a title which has always exercised a powerful influence upon the British imagination.

"My name is Wilton," she said, "I will give you my card; we shall be at the Hôtel du Louvre."

There was a little conversation after this, but it was of a somewhat formal and constrained character. Coresco was shy (although he would have been profoundly astonished if anyone had told him so); besides, it did not interest him very much to hear Mrs Wilton's descriptions of Constantinople

and of the deficiency of proper hotel accommodation in that city. Miss Wilton took no part in the colloquy. With her chin resting upon her hand, she sat gazing at the flying landscape, with her profile turned towards Coresco, who never removed his solemn black eyes from it. He wanted her to speak to him, but did not know how to make her do so, for his experience of unmarried ladies and their ways was extremely restricted. All the recognition that he obtained from her was a smiling good-night when she and her mother rose to leave the dining-car.

But the next morning, when he awoke, and, after performing his toilet with all the care and elegance that circumstances would admit of, pulled up his blind, he found that the train had already reached Szegedin in Hungary, and upon the platform there was a peasant-girl, with great bunches of lilies-of-the-valley, which she held up to him persuasively. He at once let down the window and purchased the whole of her stock in trade. Those pure white bells, those fresh green leaves, reminded him somehow of Miss Wilton, and he wondered whether he might venture to offer them to her. English people are so odd, he thought; you never can tell whether they are going to chill you with their prudery or take your breath away by their *sans-gêne*. Later in the day, when he

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found an opportunity of presenting his bouquet, he was almost awkward over it, in spite of the little set speech which he had prepared and which he duly delivered. He did not blush, because men of his complexion very rarely change colour. Miss Wilton did that for him; though she was far less embarrassed than he.

"Oh, what lovely flowers!" she exclaimed, burying her face in them. "How kind of you! Thank you so much!"

"I should have given you marguerites, should I not?" said Coresco, with his slight accent. "But they are common flowers—not worthy to bear your name."

Miss Wilton laughed. "I think Margaret is a pretty name," she said, "much prettier than *muguet*, for instance."

"And Daisy," said Coresco, "that is prettiest of all."

He lingered almost lovingly over the enunciation of the word, and then suddenly felt ashamed of himself. Little as he knew about British maidens, he knew very well how to make love; but he was not going to turn his knowledge to account in this case. In his punctilious way, he felt that it would be inexcusable to force anything that might seem like attentions upon a lady whom he had just laid under an obligation.

But Miss Wilton was unaware of the existence of such scruples or of any occasion for them. She thought this handsome foreigner a very pleasant young fellow—a little stiff, perhaps, and not remarkably brilliant, but quite a gentleman. She began chatting to him about her home in England and her anxiety to return thither, and the dislike to which she confessed for all modes of life that were not English. “It is pleasant enough to see new countries, but one is always thankful to get back to one’s own,” she said.

“That depends,” remarked Coresco, who, indeed, held a very different opinion.

“Well, *I* am thankful, at any rate. I don’t think I should ever care to go abroad if mamma didn’t enjoy it so much.”

She soon became entirely at her ease with her somewhat silent companion; she even found some of his remarks rather quaint and amusing; but when, in the course of the afternoon, she and her mother took leave of him at Vienna, with reiterated expressions of gratitude and of hope that he would call upon them in Paris, she had no sort of idea that the train bore away a Roumanian prince who was already three parts in love with her.

If a man be altogether in love there is not much to be done for him, and the malady must be left to

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run its course, but in cases which have not advanced beyond the stage of acute symptoms, alteratives may be employed with fair chance of success; and the truth is that, after Coresco had reached Paris and had been duly welcomed by his friends there, he did not think very much about Miss Daisy Wilton. Once or twice, to be sure, a vision of her fresh young face appeared to him in the wreaths of tobacco smoke which hung above the card-table; but it was so obviously out of place in that atmosphere that he frowned and dismissed it. He had plenty of other subjects to think about which, if less charming, were more exciting. At least he had always hitherto found them exciting; but now, to his surprise and alarm, it began gradually to dawn upon him that the excitements of former years had lost something of their aroma. He was not enjoying himself: it was lamentable, but it was undeniable. Could he be growing old before his time? To prove to himself that this was a groundless apprehension, he dived into deeper depths, played more recklessly, dined and supped in more uproarious company, and did all that in him lay to merit that reputation of a *viveur* which is so highly esteemed in certain circles. But it was all in vain; he only succeeded in earning for himself a perpetual headache and a dismal inward conviction that even the pleasures of Paris are

doomed to fall upon one who has made too intimate acquaintance with them.

Turning into his club one morning, to breakfast, he found an envelope addressed to him, which, on being opened, proved to contain a little bundle of bank-notes and an effusive letter, signed "Margaret Wilton." It struck him as a very absurd, not to say annoying, circumstance that Mrs Wilton should bear the same name as her daughter. Margaret, indeed, when she resembled nothing so much as a full-blown peony! However, it had to be remembered, in justice to the poor old woman, that neither her name nor her complexion were of her own choosing; and she wrote in a very friendly and amiable way. Would Prince Coreesco take pity upon two lonely travellers and dine quietly with them that evening, if he had no other engagement? They would be so glad to see him and to thank him again for his great kindness to them. "We heard nothing more of our lost tickets," Mrs Wilton wrote; "I suppose they must have been drowned in the Danube, and what would have become of us but for your timely aid I can't imagine."

Well, of course, he had another engagement; but equally, of course, he could neglect it; and he did. At the hour appointed he arrayed himself in accurate evening dress, stuck an orchid in his

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buttonhole, as usual, and repaired to the Hôtel du Louvre, where he was rather amused to find that he was expected to dine in the public restaurant attached to that establishment. The ladies were in travelling costume; they had only a little hole of a sitting-room, Mrs Wilton said, and it was impossible to get attended to upstairs. Would he excuse their lack of ceremony?

He made some appropriate reply which took a long time to deliver, and which Mrs Wilton, who was garrulous and impatient, interrupted in the middle. Coresco was not greatly fascinated by Mrs Wilton, but, after all, it was not for the pleasure of seeing her that he was dining in that caravanserai, and she made up in cordiality what she wanted in style. Besides, he discovered before the evening was over that she had other merits of a more conspicuous kind. What French mother, what Roumanian mother, would have calmly announced after dinner that she was going to write letters in her bedroom, and would have left her daughter to entertain a strange young man in the little darkening *salon* which overlooked the Rue de Rivoli and the stream of carriages and pedestrians there? Yet that was what this amazing Mrs Wilton did; and Coresco quite loved her for it.

Nor did Miss Daisy appear to see anything odd or equivocal in the situation. Sitting by the open

window, with her elbow on the sill, she prattled away to her companion with as little reserve as if he had been her brother. She had a hundred questions to ask him about Paris—the Paris of the tourists, which was to him almost an unknown city—and when he confessed that he had only once in his life been inside the Louvre, she threw up her hands in utter astonishment.

“Only once been in the Louvre! and yet you say you live so much in Paris? But what do you do with yourself, then, when you are here?”

“I dine; I sleep; I pay visits to my friends; I go to the races when there are any,” says Coresco, gravely enumerating such of his habits as could be communicated to a young lady.

“And when you are not dining, or sleeping, or paying visits, and when there are no races?”

Coresco shrugged his shoulders. “There always remains the play,” he remarked, smiling.

“But don’t you think it is almost too hot for theatres at this time of year?”

“I have used the wrong word, perhaps. You do not say the play? What I mean is the cards—the gambling.”

Miss Wilton looked very grave over this explanation. She thought Prince Coresco would be better employed in familiarising himself with the works of art in the Louvre than in winning other

people's money or losing his own, and, with a very pretty blush, she ventured to say as much. Encouraged by his silence and warming with her theme, she proceeded to read him a little lecture upon the duties and responsibilities of life. There is so much to do in the world, and there are so few people to do it! Most men must toil from morning to night only to keep themselves alive; and the rich, who have time and money—how can they expect to be pardoned if they squander both? Even innocent, healthy pleasures, such as hunting and shooting, ought not to be enough to fill anybody's existence; but gambling was not innocent; it was very wicked. "It is almost like stealing, I think!" Miss Daisy declared, trembling a little at her own audacity.

Coreesco listened to it all, amused, charmed, puzzled. "Since you deign to interest yourself in so unworthy a person, mademoiselle," said he, "I shall try to reform myself."

He went away at last in a strange and novel frame of mind. Undoubtedly there were ways in which his life admitted of reform, and he determined that reformed it should be; but never before had it occurred to him that gambling could be "very wicked." He did not, indeed, think it so now; still he actually refrained from going to the club that night, for Miss Daisy's sake.

He went home, instead, and sat up until a late hour, placidly smoking cigar after cigar and recapitulating every word of the colloquy in which he had taken so small a part. Fresh horizons seemed to have suddenly opened out before him; in the course of a few hours a complete revolution had been effected in all his tastes and aspirations; he felt that he was capable of promising never to touch a card again. Cards!—as if the stale attractions of the gaming-table could compare for one moment with the delight of accompanying Miss Wilton to the Sainte-Chapelle and the Hôtel Cluny, as he had promised that he would do on the following day! He had, in short, fallen seriously in love for the first time in his life, and he was aware of the fact and rejoiced in it, as inexperienced persons frequently do.

It was commonly reported at this time that Coresco had left Paris; there were even some knowing individuals who could tell where he had gone and who had gone with him; nobody believed a preposterous legend to the effect that he had been seen driving down the Champs Elysées in an open *fiacre*, sitting with his back to the horses and facing two English ladies of respectable but quite unfashionable exterior. Yet this phenomenon, and others not less marvellous, might have been witnessed by Prince Coresco's

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friends, had they been in the habit of frequenting the places in which he spent three perfectly happy days. He would not have cared if they had seen him; he had soared to heights which the shafts of ridicule could not reach; he asked nothing better than to be permitted to attend Miss Daisy on her sight-seeing expeditions, to carry her cloak or her sunshade for her, to listen to her prattle and bask in her smiles. She was very kind and gracious to him; his attentions were evidently not displeasing to her; and as for Mrs Wilton, she was more than gracious. "I have the mother on my side," Coresco thought, with modest exultation; "that is half the battle." It was natural that he should think so, having but a very slight knowledge of the social peculiarities of our free land.

But on the fourth day a cloud arose. Presenting himself at the Hôtel du Louvre after breakfast, as usual, Coresco was disagreeably surprised to find a long-legged, broad-shouldered, fair-haired young man lounging upon the sofa in the little sitting-room and reading the *Times*. This intruder was made known to him as Mr Power; the ladies called him Jack, and explained that he was a distant cousin of theirs.

"Jack has come over from London to escort us home," Mrs Wilton said. "He thinks we

cannot take care of ourselves; though I don't know why he should think so, considering that we managed to travel through Palestine with only a dragoman to look after us."

Coresco didn't know why either. He instantly conceived a strong prejudice against the officious Jack, which closer observation did not lessen, and which he had every reason to believe was returned with interest. If instinct had not told him at the first moment that Mr Power was his rival, circumstances must in a very short time have revealed the fact to him. Their party that day consisted of four persons, and it was evident that all future expeditionary parties would be so constituted. Mr Power's company was not asked for; he accorded it as a matter of course. This good-humoured, easy-going and not over-polished young Briton had a way of looking at Miss Wilton which made Coresco's blood boil. It was not mere admiration that his blue eyes expressed—that might have been pardoned—it was simple, unconcealed adoration, with a shade of reproach and wonder in it. When he turned towards the Roumanian his brows contracted, and he scowled with just as little attempt at disguise. It seemed clear that he had either received or thought he had received great encouragement at some previous time.

What was consolatory was that his advances

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certainly did not meet with any encouragement now. Miss Wilton would not walk with him, would hardly speak to him, and more than once in the course of the day Mrs Wilton pointedly begged him not to trouble himself with dancing attendance upon a couple of country cousins but to go away and see his friends.

"I always understood that you had such a number of friends in Paris, Jack, and that you enjoyed yourself so much with them. What is that game which you used to be so much addicted to, and which is always giving rise to such unpleasant scandals? Baccarat? Everybody has not the same tastes, fortunately. Prince Coresco, you, I am sure, are not a gambler."

"Madam, I have abandoned the habit since a certain time," said Coresco gravely.

Mr Power laughed, and Coresco turned upon him at once. "Monsieur finds that amusing?" he asked, with much urbanity.

"Awfully amusing; funniest thing I ever heard in my life!" answered the Englishman.

It was difficult to know what to make of such an unmannerly person; but, in the presence of ladies, it was perhaps better to take no further notice of him. The worst of it was that Mr Power did not seem to object to that mode of treatment. It was in vain that his cousins showed

him the cold shoulder; he was neither to be offended nor to be shaken off; and when Coresco left them in the evening he had to leave his rival in possession of the field.

For two days this annoying state of things continued. Coresco was not jealous, for Miss Wilton welcomed him with more than her usual warmth and lost no opportunity of snubbing the intrusive Jack; but, unfortunately, snubs did not prevent Jack from intruding and effectually putting a stop to those confidential and delightful conversations which good Mrs Wilton had never attempted to cut short. In those unprogressive lands between which and Western civilisation Prince Coresco's native country forms a sort of link, there is a very simple way of getting rid of obnoxious persons: you simply kill them or have them killed, and there is an end of it. Coresco—being so highly civilised—did not contemplate poisoning Mr Power's coffee; but he really thought that he would be doing Miss Wilton a service by freeing her from attentions which were obviously disagreeable to her; and that was why, finding himself alone with his rival under the archway of the hotel one evening, after escorting the ladies home from the opera, he profited by that opportunity to stamp his heel with considerable force upon the Englishman's toe.

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Mr Power caught up his leg and made use of the national expletive.

"Sir," said Coresco, "I do not permit any man to address such expressions to me."

"I don't permit any man to tread on my toe," returned the other, laughing, for he did not at first realise that the provocation had been intentional.

A shrug of Coresco's shoulders enlightened him. "Oh," said he, "you did it on purpose, did you? All right, my friend; then I'll see if I can't make you swear too."

Thereupon he raised his hand, which was a large and powerful one, and, bringing it down with a resounding crash upon the crown of Coresco's tall hat, buried that gentleman's head in the ruin thereof.

It is not everyone who, after being bonneted, can struggle out of his headgear and bow with dignity; but Prince Coresco accomplished that feat and did not swear. "You shall hear from me to-morrow, sir," was all that he said, as he majestically withdrew.

Mr Power walked upstairs sniggering to himself. "I think I made my friend look rather a fool for once," he muttered gleefully. "What a pity that Daisy wasn't there to see him!"

Coresco would have been inexpressibly shocked

if he had heard that ejaculation. To desire that a lady should be the spectator of a vulgar brawl! —atrocious! But Jack Power was not an ultra-refined person; he was only a very ordinary, honest, and somewhat devil-may-care young Englishman, who had fallen desperately in love with his pretty cousin during the preceding summer, and who, after some excuse had been given him for believing that his affection was returned, had been dismissed by a council of his cousin's family, upon the plea that his means were insufficient and his manner of life unsatisfactory. It was probably as much to remove her daughter from his vicinity as for any other reason that Mrs Wilton had decided to spend the winter in the Holy Land. But Jack, in no wise discouraged, had changed his manner of life, had broken with sundry undesirable associates, and, by means of diligence, together with a little of such nepotism as is possible in these days, had obtained promotion in his calling, which was that of a Government clerk. Thus, confident in his personal merits and improved position, he had hastened over to Paris to meet his cousin on her return from those oriental wanderings, and had found her altered, distant and, to all appearance, dazzled by the cheap glitter of a semi-oriental prince. If Mr Power was in Prince Coresco's way, it is evident that Prince Coresco was not

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less in Mr Power's way. The latter, however, being an Englishman, had not thought of getting rid of his rival by the simple expedient of treading upon his toe and then running him through the body ; still, now that the chance of thus disposing of a pestilent fellow had been given to him, he was not unwilling to take advantage of it. Of the art of fencing he had that complete ignorance which must always be accounted as bliss when compared with partial knowledge ; he imagined that one man with a sword in his hand is about as good as another similarly circumstanced, and had a comfortable conviction that weight must tell in the long run. This extraordinary young gentleman went peacefully to sleep with the idea that he could impale Prince Coresco, like a beetle upon a pin, if he chose, and his only fear was lest he should hurt the man mortally in so doing ; for, of course, he did not want to kill him.

Coresco, on the other hand, though he did not propose to kill the Englishman, would have done so, at a pinch, without any scruple at all. Why not ? In a fair fight, one or other combatant must needs fall ; and really there seemed to be no reason for supposing that Mr Power's death would inflict any loss upon civilisation or humanity. What changed his point of view and caused him no slight perplexity was the discovery that a fight with Mr

Power would not, and could not, be in any sense a fair fight.

He found this out on the following afternoon, in a secluded, sylvan glade of the forest of Saint-Germain, which had been selected as suitable for the discharging of the business in hand. The preliminaries had passed off rapidly and with very little discussion. Power, who had numerous acquaintances in Paris, had easily found a couple of seconds; and as apologies were out of the question, no hitch or obstacle had occurred to delay the merry meeting. But what is to be done with a man who, the moment that his weapon has been crossed with yours, plunges at you like a born lunatic, in total disregard of all rule and science? Coresco had no difficulty in parrying his adversary's furious onslaught; he would have had little or no difficulty in terminating the conflict in the first two minutes; yet he hesitated to take advantage of his superior skill. It is probably much the same thing to a bird to be shot sitting or flying; but it is not the same thing to the man who shoots the bird; and little as Coresco cared about prolonging Mr Power's life, he felt that he would be guilty of nothing less than murder if he slew one who was so completely at his mercy. Half vexed, half inclined to laugh, he contemplated his opponent's fantastic gambols and awaited his

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opportunity. He would give the fellow a prick in the arm and let him go, he thought ; the whole thing was an absurd farce, and he regretted having brought it about.

But, alas ! victory does not always declare herself for the strong or the scientific ; improbabilities are continually happening, and combats have been won against overwhelming odds again and again since David laid the champion of the Philistines low with a pebble. These things have to be accounted for in some way, and when the strong man is beaten by the feeble one, we are generally told that the former has courted misadventure by despising his enemy. It may be that Coresco fell into this fatal error, or again it may be that he was really confused by a method of attack which resembled nothing that he had ever seen or heard of before. In any case, it came to pass that, hastily parrying a wild lunge of Mr Power's, he caught the point of the Englishman's weapon on the inside of his hand, which was instantly transfixed by it.

This perforce put an end to the encounter, since Coresco could now no longer hold a sword. While the doctor was bandaging his wound for him, the Englishman came up and blurted out, rather awkwardly, "I hope I haven't hurt you much."

Coresco, always urbane and self-possessed, yet with a slight cloud upon his brow, bowed and replied, "It is a nothing ;" and so the foes parted.

That evening there walked into a well-known Parisian club a gloomy personage, with his arm in a sling, whose entrance gave the signal for a general outburst of amiable raillery. "Heaven be praised! our Coresco is restored to us, alive, though wounded. Is it permitted to expose oneself to such dangers on the eve of one's marriage?"—"Tell me, my dear friend, must we go to the Hôtel de Ville or to the Protestant temple to see the last of you?"—"Ah, he is sly, that old Coresco! He discovers that in England there is no love without marriage; but he does not let himself be disconcerted by such a trifle. He gets somebody to fight with him; he receives an unfortunate wound; and, 'Mademoiselle,' says he, 'unhappily, for the moment, I have no hand to offer you; be contented with the knowledge that you possess my heart.'"

Why had Coresco, who knew very well that his seconds were not the men to keep so good a joke as his eccentric duel secret, laid himself open to these impertinences? For the simple reason that he could not show himself at the Hôtel du Louvre in his maimed state without entering into explanations, and that it was perfectly impossible for him

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to sit at home doing nothing. After all, he was not easily put out of countenance, and two hands are not required in order to play baccarat. He gave himself leave to break through his recently formed resolution for that once. Even if Miss Daisy could know how he was employed, she would acknowledge that, under the circumstances, he had no alternative.

Baccarat, though it had lost its old charm for him, was all very well as a means of whiling the night away; but what was to be done with the long hours of daylight?

This was what Coresco asked himself ruefully on the morrow, and so unable was he to solve the problem that towards five o'clock he gave it up in despair and had himself driven to the Hôtel du Louvre. He was not sure that it was in the best possible taste to appear in his disabled condition before the lady for whose sake he had allowed himself to be disabled; but there really seemed to be no help for it. He must carry his arm in a sling for the next ten days at least, and in less than ten days Miss Wilton would have left Paris.

He thought himself fortunate when he found the object of his respectful devotion alone; but his satisfaction was short-lived.

"Prince Coresco," she exclaimed, starting up

with flashing eyes as he entered, "I hope—I do hope that you are ashamed of yourself! You, who, of course, like all foreigners, are an accomplished swordsman, to pick a quarrel with my poor cousin, who had done nothing to offend you, when you must have known perfectly well that Englishmen never fight duels! It was very wrong of him to accept your challenge; but he says that he could not submit to be called a coward, and I suppose no man would. And you pretended to be our friend!"

"But, mademoiselle," pleaded the astonished Coresco, "since Mr Power has thought fit to take the unheard-of course of informing you that he crossed swords with me yesterday——"

"He did no such thing!" interrupted Miss Wilton indignantly. "It was the hotel porter who told our maid what had become of you both; and you may imagine what an afternoon we spent!"

"I regret it infinitely, and I shall have two words to say to the porter, who must be quite unfit for his situation. But I was about to remark that, since you are aware that a duel has occurred, you must also be aware that your cousin has known very well how to defend himself."

"That only shows that Providence protected him; it does not prove that you had any wish to spare his life. For Jack there was some excuse—

more than one excuse, indeed; but I cannot see that there was the least excuse in the world for you. What possible reason could you have for fighting my cousin?"

"Ah, mademoiselle!—do you not know?" exclaimed Coresco. "Have you not understood that I love you? Pardon me that I so far disregard the proprieties as to speak to you in this way. I should, I am aware, have addressed myself in the first instance to your honoured mamma; but I cannot endure to see you angry with me. Pardon me, also I pray you, my unfortunate affair with your cousin. I was, no doubt, in the wrong; I ought to have remembered that he was of the family; but I saw in him only a *prétendant* who was annoying to you, and——"

"Oh, but indeed no!" interrupted Miss Wilton; "he was not annoying at all." She paused, and then, with a considerable access of colour, added: "Perhaps I had better tell you at once that I am engaged to be married to him."

Poor Coresco fell somewhat heavily from the clouds. But he did not, even in this moment of cruel disenchantment, lose his sense of what was correct.

"In that case, mademoiselle," said he, with a low bow, "it only remains for me to offer you my sincere felicitations and retire."

But perhaps his face was more eloquent than his tongue, or it may be that Miss Wilton, being herself in love, was quick at detecting symptoms of a genuine case of that malady in another. She stepped hastily forward and intercepted him as he was making for the door.

"I am very sorry," she said simply; "I didn't know—I never supposed——" She held out her hand to him, looking at him with soft, pitying eyes.

"Dear Miss Daisy," answered Coresco, "it is I who have been unpardonably stupid, and you have nothing to be sorry for. As for me, I shall be glad all my life that I have known you. I shall never marry, and I shall never cease to love you. You will not mind my saying that, as it is so very unlikely that we shall meet again."

"But I hope we shall often meet again, and I don't at all like you to say such things," protested the girl. "It would be dreadful if it were true; but how can it be true? In one short week——"

"One short week, mademoiselle, may easily count for more than ten years. During ten years it has never happened to me to fall in love; I thought even that I was not capable of love; but in a week you have shown me my mistake. I do not complain; it is not to everybody that a week of happiness is accorded."

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The rejoinder which Miss Wilton was beginning to make to this somewhat lackadaisical speech was nipped in the bud by the abrupt entrance of her mother, who, taking in the situation at a glance, groaned aloud. "Oh, Daisy, you foolish, foolish girl!" she exclaimed.

Miss Daisy promptly turned and fled—which was, perhaps, the very best thing that she could have done—and Mrs Wilton, relieved of a presence which might have been a little disconcerting, plumped down into the nearest arm-chair and groaned again.

"All your fault!" was her first intelligible ejaculation. "You had my best wishes, I'm sure—and, really, I thought she had got over that silly infatuation about Jack. And everything seemed to be going so smoothly! But then you must needs go and spoil it all by fighting a duel with a man whom you ought never to have noticed. It would have been so easy to leave him alone! All yesterday afternoon we were expecting to see his lifeless body carried in upon a shutter, and I need hardly say that, when he made his appearance, safe and sound, Daisy simply hurled herself into his arms. Well, not literally perhaps, but it comes to the same thing. Thanks to you, they had a full explanation in the course of the evening, and he convinced her that he had been true to her

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during their separation—which she seems to have doubted.”

“But, madam,” said Coresco, a little puzzled, “if you disapprove of this marriage, surely you, as Miss Wilton’s mother——”

“Not a bit of it!” broke in the old lady. “In England we can’t prevent our daughters from marrying as they please, unless they choose a man who is positively disreputable or impossibly poor—and not always then. When Jack first proposed he was very badly off; but he has obtained an increase of salary since, and Daisy has a little of her own, and—and so there is no more to be said. He is not a bad young man in his way; but—well, I wish things could have fallen out otherwise!” sighed Mrs Wilton in conclusion, meaning, perhaps, that she would have liked her daughter to be a princess.

Coresco got away as soon as he could. He was bitterly disappointed, but he bore his disappointment with a good deal of dignity. On the following day he called to make his adieux, and having been reconciled with his successful rival, who displayed much more embarrassment upon the occasion than he did, left Paris a few hours later.

Miss Wilton, on her wedding-day, wore in her hair some magnificent diamond pins, fashioned in

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the shape of marguerites, which were not the gift of the bridegroom. The donor of these jewels is no longer to be met with in the gay city where he purchased them, nor has he availed himself of Mrs Power's cordial invitation to visit her in her English home. He is at present residing on his Roumanian estates, the improvement of which by scientific agricultural methods appears to occupy all his attention. He has confided to his mother that he is a changed man, that life has become serious to him, that he recognises its duties and has ceased to care for its pleasures—that he has, in short, loved once and can never love again. He has further made known to her his unalterable purpose of remaining a bachelor all his days; but that is a bold assertion for any man to make in countries where maternal influence counts for more than it does in our own; and Princess Coresco, who is a wise woman and knows her own power, is content to smile at it silently.

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